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JACK SCUDAMORE'S DAUGHTER

A Domestic Story

BY

FOLKESTONE WILLIAMS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.





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JACK SCUDAMORE'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERESTING ADVENTURE.

ARTHUR CALVERLEY was born with certain recommendations—prominent among which were a good social position and an honourable name. To be sure he laboured under the serious disadvantage of being a younger son, and, in consequence, of having little of importance to inherit—but then he belonged to one of "the governing families"—those favoured nurseries of statesmen, generals, prelates, admirals, judges, and high officials of every description.

Among his immediate connections he could boast of one Governor-General of India, two Lord-

Lieutenants of Ireland, as many Speakers of the House of Commons, a Lord-Chancellor, a Field-Marshal, three Cabinet Ministers, at least half-a-dozen Members of Parliament, and I know not how many Knights of the Bath and the Garter.

With the education the boy received from the customary sources, he was taught the value of the examples which the family picture-gallery afforded. In the careers of several of the collateral branches of his house he was shown what younger brothers were capable of doing for themselves. Instances of self-help of a singularly suggestive character.

There was his uncle, Lord Madras, who had gone to the East with two shirts and his mother's blessing, and had returned a Nabob, to be raised to the Peerage and become Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. There was his great-uncle, Sir Ralph Calverley, K.C.B., who being the younger son of a younger son, had no patrimony but his sword; yet with that perhaps not very valuable weapon he contrived to carve for himself the repu-

tation of a successful general and an energetic colonial governor; and when he died of the gout at Cheltenham, left a very pretty fortune to his heirs.

There was his kinsman, the very Reverend Jacob Calverley, D.D., who was not only so poorly provided with resources at college that he could scarcely pay his fees, but was so stupid that every body expected he would be plucked; nevertheless he died the richest bishop in the three kingdoms. Moreover, there was his father's second cousin, Paul Calverley, for whom nothing better could be done than article him to a London lawyer; but before he was consigned to the family vault he had raised himself to the woolsack, and secured an earldom to his eldest son.

In the home circle, as early as Arthur could remember, these notables and a dozen others equally fortunate were constantly suggested to him as models. It was not only most forcibly impressed upon his plastic mind that they were worthy of imitation because they had been successful in the several professions they had adopted, but in a much

greater degree, because they had maintained the purity of the family blood.

Those who had married had selected partners with high social pretensions. This was dwelt upon with immense satisfaction. Indeed, I do not know whether his cousin Tom Calverley, in the Guards, who had eloped to Gretna Green with a duke's daughter, though he afterwards died in the rules of the King's Bench, was not thought more of than the Governor-General of India, who had been contented with a baron's niece.

Arthur Calverley was therefore brought up with the very best notions as to marrying well, and they were inculcated a long time before they could be rendered available. In truth it was a favourite theme with his excellent mother, who being nearly related to a Welsh baronet lineally descended from the ancient kings of Wales, thought that she could not say too much to a child of hers on so momentous a topic.

His first misfortune was to lose her at a particularly impressionable age; but though he was

deprived of the advantage of her teaching, he never forgot her precepts. Her affectionate tuition—almost always, by the way, combined with some precious indulgence—not only had a lasting effect, but was suggestive of the most pleasurable associations.

His father, the Right Honourable Sir Edward Calverley Calverley, Bart., G.C.B., was a diplomatist of some repute, but died in a far-off capital while fulfilling his ambassadorial duties, when Arthur was pursuing his studies at a public school in England. Owing to Sir Calverley having been constantly employed abroad almost from the boy's birth, the latter had enjoyed very little of his attention, consequently his sorrow for the loss of such a parent was not so poignant as it otherwise would have been.

He was soon made to understand that he was but slenderly provided for, and that if he wished to make a figure in the world, he must apply himself diligently to his books. He was sent by his guardian to reside with a private tutor, a studious

young clergyman living in a very out-of-the-way district in Cheshire; while his elder brother, who succeeded to the title and estates, began a town career of extravagance, and seemed inclined to give himself little further concern on his account.

I do not think that the Vicar of Delamere Parva had any very serious fault to find with his pupil, for he was diligent and well disposed. He gave him scarcely any trouble, and as, besides his small parish to attend to, he was editing a new edition of Æschylus, this was a recommendation of which the youth enjoyed the full advantage. Among other indulgences he was permitted to ride where he liked as soon as he had creditably got through his daily tasks; and as he was gifted with an excellent memory, this stipulation was observed with unfailing punctuality.

Belonging, as Arthur did, to one of the oldest county families, there was no difficulty in the way of making acquaintance with the neighbouring gentry in the course of his rambles. This occasionally led to his remaining away from the vicar-

age two or three days; but as, on his return, he invariably brought up all arrears to his instructor's perfect satisfaction, as well as supplied the reverend gentleman with complimentary recognitions from his more influential neighbours, it was only on rare occasions that notice was taken of his absence. In short, tutor and pupil never got on better together.

On one of these excursions, rather late in the afternoon of a genial autumn day, Arthur Calverley approached a celebrated monastic ruin situated in a picturesque part of Vale Delamere—so called from the mere (sheet of water) to be found there. It was far from any turnpike-road, or public path. Originally the edifice must have covered a very large area, and had been one of the most magnificent abbeys erected in the best period of Anglo-Norman architecture in England.

Whatever were its attractions in its present state to the antiquary, the country people were not disposed to acknowledge them. The fact is, it had got a bad name. There were all kinds of stories and traditions circulating in the neighbourhood

about the place. The abbot had committed a murder; the monks had participated in the crime; and the ghosts of the cowled community were doomed to haunt the sacred precincts they had desecrated by so atrocious a deed. The victim, a young lady of rank, who had come to the abbey on a religious errand, and whose fortune and estates the brotherhood subsequently appropriated, was said to appear in spectral guise at the altar of the ruined monastery under which she had been buried; by so doing to bear everlasting testimony against the criminals in the face of offended Heaven.

Such was the monastic tradition.

There was also a story of a band of robbers who had long made the abbey their rendezvous, whence they waylaid travellers; murdered, robbed them, and made away with their bodies so secretly that nothing was ever heard of them after.

Besides, there were equally authentic accounts of a gang of desperate smugglers who had been the terror of the whole country, hiding in the ruins

and in the neighbouring woods by day, and carrying on their unlawful occupations in the dead of the night.

There was not a farmer, much less a farmer's labourer for twenty miles round, who would approach the place after dusk, and the most courageous poacher would give it a wide berth, whatever amount of game might be got in that direction. As for women entering the ruins even in broad daylight, the idea was enough to make them turn pale with affright.

It was with a full knowledge of this evil reputation that Arthur was cantering on "Trusty" on the outskirts of the wood, as the broken walls, crumbling windows, and massive arches of this relic of the Middle Ages rose before him—assuredly the most picturesque ruin he had ever seen; and though he has since seen many similar evidences of the taste and skill of our ancestors, he never beheld one the appearance of which affected him so deeply.

He rode slowly forward, to observe as carefully

as possible the elegance as well as the grandeur of the principal portion of the building—not without a sense of awe mingling largely with the feeling of admiration the scene inspired. There stood the graceful windows, of which the masonry of many was nearly perfect—particularly one of wonderful beauty of design; the rich columns with much of their intricate ornamentation almost as perfect as when fresh from the chisel. Elsewhere the fanciful corbels, bosses, and crocketts attracted his notice, as well as the quaint gargoyles, and the beautiful though mutilated figures still remaining in their niches, of apostles, angels, and saints.

As he came nearer, and saw through the open arches glimpses of the interior—of nave and chancel, of chantry and lady-chapel, and of the numerous compartments into which an ecclesiastical edifice built on such a scale must necessarily be divided, then caught a view of clustering tombstones, columns, crosses, and other memorials of the dead,—he felt the stillness and solitude which seemed to pervade the atmosphere, and the thril-

ling tradition and the marvellous stories he had heard recurred to his mind.

His faithful companion and fellow-traveller suddenly stood still with ears erect as if he either felt the genius loci or heard something of a suspicious nature. The youth was just about coming to the conclusion that the better part of curiosity as well as valour was discretion, and was turning his horse's head to have a good start in time, when he was startled by sounds coming evidently from within the ruins.

If he had heard the yells of perturbed spirits, the ribald oaths of highwaymen, or the riotous mirth of smugglers, I do not think he would have been so very much surprised; for they would have been characteristic of the fearful tales he had been told—but there suddenly came upon his ear the most wonderful, the most melodious, the most touching burst of harmony to which he had ever listened.

Indeed, he had never heard such music. He could compare it to nothing less divine than a choir

of angels, for it was as solemn as it was sweet, and so eminently devotional, that he could not help feeling exactly the same sense of dependence and veneration he had always experienced when saying his prayers in the solitude of his own chamber.

What it was he heard, he had not the most remote idea; but he could not avoid a certain mingling of the supernatural with the speculations in which he indulged. He possessed courage as well as curiosity; and feeling an ardent desire to penetrate the mystery, he presently alighted, fastened the reins of his four-footed friend round a thorn, and crept cautiously towards a window whence the soul-moving music appeared to have been wafted toward him.

Suddenly it ceased. The air became as supernaturally still as it before had been supernaturally melodious. Arthur was close under the graceful lanceolated window that appeared to have once lighted a side-chapel, dedicated to some saint, whose broken effigy stood before it. He held his breath, for in the profound quietude he thought

he distinguished a voice. He could not make out what was said, though a word here and there seemed familiar to him, but the language was unquestionably foreign.

He stood irresolute, not daring to move for fear of discovery, yet impelled by an overpowering curiosity to ascertain what such strange sounds in so very strange a place could mean. The framework of the window was far above his head, and the wall around and beneath covered with thick ivy. He had a great desire to peer over the open masonry, but it was more easy to think of than to do. If he attempted to climb, the noise he would be sure to make would betray his whereabout, and the probable result did not appear encouraging.

Again the combination of voices swelled out, but apparently in greater volume than before, and with an earnestness that for a minute or two held his senses enthralled. He was a daring climber; so, with an impulse he could not control, he seized the tough tendrils of a creeper, and with the aid of

projections in the wall, contrived to pull himself up till he stood in the centre of the open window.

He looked down upon a group of females, clothed, for the most part, in dark-flowing garments. He could see their faces, for they were singing, with eyes gazing upward, and hands clasped in an attitude of devotion. All had a foreign and unfamiliar look, except one, who stood apart. She was a woman a little past the prime of life, of noble stature, and of singularly pleasing features. He could not doubt that she was English, any more than he could doubt that she was of high birth.

They were all singing; and now he could distinguish that the language they sung so impressively was Latin. It became at once clear to him, extraordinary as seemed the fact, that he beheld a community of nuns engaged in the ordinary daily exercises of their church. If he had recognised the unearthly nature of the atrocious brotherhood, or had discovered that he had fallen into a veritable den of thieves and cut-throats, I doubt he would

have felt the shock he experienced when he became aware that he had intruded upon the private devotions of a Roman Catholic sisterhood.

He was not in the slightest degree aware of there being any convent in the county, much less in the neighbourhood. Indeed, he had never seen a nun, although he had often looked at the engravings in Dugdale, representing the principal monastic orders, and therefore had no difficulty in recognising the religious habit. But he could not account for such a community having assembled in the abbey ruins, and there going through their devotional exercises. He was amazed. It seemed so very mysterious that no one with whom he was acquainted should have heard of their existence.

However astonished and mystified he might be by the unusual spectacle, he was conscious that there was but one thing proper for him to do—to retire as cautiously as he had intruded. He felt great repugnance to disturb those melodious devotees, and therefore resolved at once to descend from his elevation.

This resolution he promptly put in force; but his good intentions were frustrated—probably by his haste in endeavouring to fulfil them—for treading on a loose stone, it gave way, and he was suddenly precipitated upon the stone pavement below.

When Arthur Calverley again became conscious he had no idea either of how long he had remained insensible, or what had been done with him subsequently to his terrible fall on the flags. The last sounds he had in his ears were female screams and shrieks—the last objects, female faces wearing the strongest expressions of horror and affright.

As consciousness returned, he became aware that he lay on a narrow pallet in a small chamber almost bare of furniture. On the walls he could see nothing but a crucifix and a picture of the Virgin and Child, before which a taper was burning. On the floor there was a common chair and a rough table, on which lay two or three books and a long chain of beads; the latter he knew to be a rosary.

He felt very stiff and bruised all over. There

was a great pain down his left arm, which was confined in a stiff wrapper, and suspended in a sling; and he had a still more acute pain in his head, which was enveloped in a bandage. He lay in his clothes, his boots only having been taken off; but the sleeve of his jacket had been slipt up the seam to the shoulder; and every care appeared to have been taken to prevent his bruised limbs from suffering by coming in contact with a hard substance.

The light afforded by the taper was just sufficient to enable him to distinguish the objects around —that, and the pervading stillness, assured him it was night. Presently a glitter caught his eye; and as he turned round, he became aware that a small casement of very narrow panes was a little above his head, on his right-hand side. A curious rattling sound, evidently at a distance, attracted his attention at the same time.

He raised himself by means of his sound arm, but not without considerable difficulty, till his head was on a level with the window. He looked out into a cemetery—a wilderness of tall nettles, thistles,

and rank grass, that half-concealed many of the mossy tombstones and broken monuments with which it was filled. The light, however, from a crescent moon, that seemed to shine with unusual brilliance in the clear starry vault above, fell upon every crumbling cross, broken pillar, and mouldering footstone, bringing out each object with startling vividness.

The strange sounds he heard directed his attention to a figure in a stooping posture, partly sunk in a hollow in a portion of the cemetery, where the weeds were thickest. Presently he observed a tall gaunt form raise itself, and with long bare arms ply a pickaxe vigorously—then take a spade and throw on an adjoining mound the earth that had been loosened.

On this person he could easily distinguish the habit of the nuns he had discovered from his dangerous post of observation. She wore a long dark gown, with a hood that enveloped her head; her face and neck appeared to be bound with white linen. But what could she be doing at that hour,

in so dreadful a place? he mentally inquired, as he observed her long bony arms plying the pick, and then shovelling up the broken soil. Not the soil only, for he could plainly discern several white objects among the dark mould, and these, with a thrill of dread, he recognised as human bones.

It was evident that he looked upon the place of sepulture belonging to the ruined abbey; and he could not avoid coming to the conclusion that the solitary nun was digging a grave. With a strange fascination he continued to watch her labours, as she rapidly widened the hollow and increased the mound beside it, without heeding the bats wheeling above her, or the great owl that now and then swooped down close to her head.

"Is she digging that grave for *me?*" he asked himself, with a nervous shudder he could not control. He had been left unattended—probably given over, and a long state of unconsciousness might have created a conviction of his death. In the deplorable prostration to which he was reduced, the

idea filled him with a sickening sense of dread. A confused feeling in the head, and an overpowering faintness came upon him simultaneously, and he sank back on his pallet in a swoon.

In this condition he must have remained at least an hour. His first impression on recovery was derived from a kind of wailing harmony, inexpressibly melancholy. He seemed to be waking from a painful dream, with the sounds and objects of the vision fading from his perception. But the music became louder. He could distinguish human voices in combination, and they appeared to come from the cemetery below.

He again raised himself, and opened a portion of the window large enough to allow of his putting out his head. Instantly the plaintive melody of a penitential psalm became distinctly audible—the moonlight was more brilliant than before; and below he could plainly discern the community of religieuses he had previously seen, slowly advancing in the direction of the open grave, by the side of which still stood the gaunt figure, leaning on a

spade, with an expression in her rigid features he long afterwards remembered.

The procession advanced singing, headed by the stately form he had remarked on his first sight of the sisterhood. She held an open book in her hand, and a profound sorrow mingled in her fine countenance with a holy resignation, as she lifted her eyes to heaven. She was followed by four of the sisters, bearing a sort of litter, on which reclined a figure in the same habit—the face exposed, the arms crossed, and a crucifix reposing on the breast. The countenance looked of a pale bluish white in the moonlight. It was that of a corpse. Behind, two and two, came the rest of the nuns, singing their sorrowful chorus, with arms crossed and eyes uplifted.

Presently the psalm ceased, and the mourners grouped round the new-made grave, the body resting on boards placed over it. Then the leader read from the book in her hand what appeared to be the Service for the Dead. After which burst forth a joyful hymn, as if to express the conviction of the

survivors that their departed sister had passed out of the Gates of Death into those of Eternal Life.

Whilst this was being sung, ropes were thrown over the boards by several pairs of strong arms, and the corpse slowly descended into its narrow bed.

Arthur Calverley hurriedly closed the casement, and regained his recumbent position, in a state of intense excitement and wonder. Could the scene he had witnessed be nothing more substantial than a dream? he continued to ask over and over again, as he found great difficulty in reconciling himself to what was so very different from any thing he had met with in his experience.

Those foreign faces and unfamiliar habits of this singular residence, and the solemn service so unexpectedly brought under his attention, assisted in creating a sense of awe not unmixed with dread. Wonderfully vivid was the impression the spectacle left upon his mind. The stern impassive look of the grave-digger—the sublime earnestness of the

reader of the service—and the thrilling voices of the mourning sisters were never to be erased from his recollection.

Presently he fell asleep, and did not wake till a flood of sunshine filled his little chamber, and the singing of innumerable birds his ears. How pleasant seemed the voices of the rival thrushes—how inspiring the rich strain of the blackbirds—how refreshing the merry twitter of the sparrows and finches at that moment!

He certainly felt better and stronger; but his arm was still very stiff, and there was a dull pain in his head. He put up his hand to the bandage, and could feel leech-bites over a considerable portion of the forehead; and all around was exceedingly tender to the touch.

He must have had a very bad fall, and it was equally clear to him that his hurts had been most carefully attended to. But to whom had he been indebted for this timely service? He felt an impression that the Christian ladies on whose privacy he had so thoughtlessly intruded must have been

both his surgeons and his nurses. He could not remember, however, having seen either of them about him.

A vivid recollection of the midnight funeral made him spring up, forgetful of his bruised limb; but though he received a terrible twinge, he eagerly opened the casement. He looked out, fully expecting to see the long bony arms of the grave-digger still at her solitary work, and to hear the melancholy psalm of the mourners, as they bore their departed sister to her last resting-place.

But the scene was entirely changed. The bones of the dead monks, that had glistened so ghastly in the moonlight, had totally disappeared, and golden sunbeams threw a glory over the flowering thistles and other blossoms that flourished among the rank herbage. Presently he discerned a freshly-made mound, but it was already covered with flowers—mementos, probably, of the affection of the surviving sisters—and a robin was singing lustily on a small white headstone, on which had been cut a cross and some initials; while from the sur-

rounding trees and walls there came a chorus as jubilant as that which he had heard announce the advent of the blessed one into Paradise.

The balmy air seemed to revive and the genial music to cheer him, so that he continued for some minutes gazing over the ruined cemetery with feelings totally different from those with which he had watched the gaunt female figure in the dark habit rudely casting aside the mortal remains of the original possessors of the monastery.

At last he withdrew his head, leaving the window open, and lay down to think over the strange events that had brought him into his present peculiar position. While thus employed, he fancied he could hear a sound as of some one talking. He got off his pallet, and advanced to the side of his chamber on which stood the rush chair. There he found a partition roughly put together of deal boards. He peeped through a crevice, and beheld below a capacious vaulted room of irregular shape, and of a remarkably ancient and rather cheerless aspect. It possessed a large projecting chimney, but there

was no fire on the hearth. The floor was of red brick, and in the centre stood a long heavy table, with benches on each side, where sat the nuns in their dark habits in two rows opposite each other.

He saw at a glance that it was the refectory of the convent; for the sisters were silently making a simple meal of bread and fruit. In a tall chair at the head of the table sat the lady superior. Arthur recognised her at once by her fine matronly features and peculiarly dignified appearance. Her look was that of a saint, full of the confidence which a devout faith inspires.

At the other end of the table he saw a face still more strongly impressed upon his memory—the dark complexion, the high cheek-bones, the cold gloomy unsympathising expression of the midnight worker in the deserted graveyard. She was standing up reading aloud from a book of legends of saints written in French.

He looked from one to another, but all seemed to wear the same air of self-mortification and abstraction; each sister evidently attending more to

the reading than to the repast. In most he could mark the influence of asceticism, if not of deep mental suffering; but there was one countenance on which his gaze rested with a refreshing sense of relief—a young round face with soft brown eyes, that even with the formal dress, and surrounded by such profound solemnity, could not entirely conceal the natural instincts of youth.

While gazing, the harsh voice of the reader ceased. The superior rose, the entire sisterhood following her example, and in a rich clear voice she pronounced a grace in Latin. Then she sat down, each of the nuns in turn knelt before her, and, having received what appeared to be a benediction, walked with downcast eyes and slow steps out of the chamber.

Arthur returned to his couch, marvelling at his position more than ever. It was quite clear that he was in the charge of these pious women, and he could not entertain a doubt that they had attended to his wants like good Samaritans. Still the strangeness of the situation struck him very

forcibly. His powers of perception must yet have been much confused, for he could not succeed in explaining satisfactorily to himself how the Abbey ruins could have become so tenanted.

Whilst absorbed in a reverie, he heard an exclamation in French; and looking quickly in the direction, discerned in the doorway the figure of the young nun, or rather pupil, whose appearance had so much attracted him a few minutes before.

"Le pauvre hérétique!" she murmured. "The Blessed Virgin watch over him! I will say an Ave, that it may benefit his miserable soul."

She crossed herself devoutly, and repeated the Latin prayer. Then exclaimed again, in French, "Alas, he is so young!"

"I thank you, mademoiselle, for your great goodness to me," he replied in the same language.

At the sound of his voice she started, and crossed herself repeatedly, betraying in her looks the deepest emotion.

"Felicia!" cried a loud voice from below.

"Mea culpa!" murmured the girl, looking contrite; "I have broken my vow of silence. Mea culpa! mea culpa!"

She then hurried away.

The youth was not left long alone. Presently he heard a firm tread advancing, and the majestic figure of the abbess entered the little chamber. She looked searchingly, and at first with some severity, but by degrees a kinder expression became visible in her clear blue eyes. The nearer she approached the more impressed Arthur felt by her noble features.

"You are better, Mr. Calverley," she said to him in English. "Sister Gudule, who is an experienced doctress, has taken care of you since your accident. She has been lately much occupied by a sorrowful duty, but will very shortly be disengaged."

It seemed as strange as every thing else connected with his present position, that he should be known. As if the abbess divined his thoughts, she added:

"Your name was written in your pocket-book, which dropped as you fell: by that I was able to ascertain that you were the son of one of the friends of my girlhood; and every thing was at once done for you that the emergency required. Thanks to the Immaculate Virgin and to her thrice-blessed Son, for whose help we prayed, you have escaped a terrible death; but I am quite at a loss to discover the motive which could have induced a young gentleman to run so great a risk."

Arthur explained exactly how he had been led to climb to the ruined window, disclaiming any knowledge of the abbey being tenanted. She was pleased with his explanation, especially with his earnestness in assuring her that he had not the most remote intention of disturbing the devotions of the sisterhood.

She did not seem surprised at his ignorance.

"Though we have found a temporary refuge in this remote place," she said quietly, "only the few Catholics in the neighbourhood are aware that these ruins have been made habitable.

I must warn you," she added more gravely, "that your nurse Sister Gudule is under a vow of silence. I shall see you again, and you can say to me whatever you think proper. While you remain here, be careful not to occasion an infringement of our rigid rules. When you have left us, my son, be still more careful not to betray the poor sisters who have saved your life."

It was impossible to resist the quiet decision, yet graceful dignity of her manner while thus speaking. She had left the room, however, before Arthur could venture on a reply. So deep was the sense of respect she had excited, that he felt hurt and humbled that she should think necessary the caution she had given. He could not but be grateful to the good nuns for the care they had taken of him; and a boyish sentiment of chivalry was too strongly implanted in his nature to allow of the confidence they had reposed in him being abused.

There was something too in the adventure that reconciled him to the suffering and injury it had

brought with it. He was in a nunnery! Surrounded by these holy recluses, of whom previously he had entertained only a very dreamy and romantic idea. The motherly kindness of the superior had been totally different to his conception of the character of an abbess: and to meet with a nun like the blooming tender Felicia, was a surprise indeed.

He hoped that Sister Gudule, who had nursed him, might resemble her in some degree; but though he tried to recal the faces of the other sisters, he could not remember one any thing like so attractive. They were all foreign and hard-featured; some were old, and the rest looked too sad and solemn for the youthful mind to care to dwell upon.

Speculating on this interesting subject, he heard a footstep. He knew that it must be his female Samaritan. His pulsation began to increase with the anticipation of a sympathising face bending over him, and a pair of gentle hands unfastening his bandages. A tall figure entered.

The youth looked up eagerly, and gazed upon the hard stern features of the gravedigger.

Associating her, as he could not help doing, with the bones of the dead monks he had seen her so carelessly knocking about, and observing more closely than he had done in the moonlight, her emaciated face and sunken eyes, there was no fear that he should make any attempt to induce her to disregard her vow of silence.

He made no effort to speak, for he had not the slightest inclination to do so, all the time his nurse was examining the state of his hurts; indeed I do not think that he breathed freely till the gaunt form had, after replacing the bandages, and pouring some medicine out of a bottle into a cup, stalked more like a ghost than a human being from the chamber.

"And so, that is Sister Gudule," he thought, and shuddered.

CHAPTER II.

A CLERICAL PARTY.

THE Reverend Basil Plynlymmon was walking in the vicarage garden. He was a tall young man of fair complexion, watery gray eyes, and very light hair. His face was bare of whisker or beard, had a prominent thin long nose, a narrow receding forehead, and a mouth somewhat feminine in its proportions. His general aspect was expressive of feebleness "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," for he was of very studious habits; and as he shut one eye and puckered up the other under a glass that closely fitted the orbit; moreover, as he wore his academical cap and gown over his well-worn clerical suit, and his long legs seemed to open as he went like a pair of compasses measuring an architectural drawing,

—his appearance was rather singular than prepossessing.

Notwithstanding the want of energy expressed in his countenance, the vicar of Little Delamere was both industrious and ambitious. He had gained a prize in the last flower-show in the county-town for his china-asters, and occupied all his leisure and his scholarship in editing a Greek play. He had always been anxious to distinguish himself, with the great object of preferment; and though the income of the vicarage was small, he hoped by taking pupils, and by the display of his miscellaneous talents, to raise himself into notice.

Hitherto, however, his advantages had been confined to the publication of a pedantic letter in the county newspaper, but the journal having an exclusive agricultural circulation, no one had read his communication; the award of the munificent sum of ten-and-sixpence for his prize china-asters; and the emolument derivable from one pupil.

Strange to say they did not content him; and

having made a careful calculation of the number of bishops who were presumed to owe their mitres to their classical attainments, the reverend gentleman was now stalking down the gravel-path of the vicarage garden, his black gaiters strapped over his shoes, supremely indifferent to the attractions of his floral pets, having a volume of Æschylus open in one hand, and striving to master the meaning of an extremely difficult passage.

As he was reciting the lines aloud, with declamation as eccentric as his gesture, the sublimity of the great dramatist, to an ordinary looker-on, must have been lost in a perception of the ridiculous. Nevertheless, as the would-be editor approached the end of the walk, a rich sonorous voice that contrasted strongly with the inharmonious intonation that had been delivering the chorus, burst out into hearty praise.

The Vicar looked mildly through his eye-glass in the direction whence the unexpected sounds proceeded, apparently rather foolishly confused at being so completely caught in the fact. He be-

held a dark complexion and a pair of flashing eyes under a wide-awake, then an athletic figure in a light blouse, with a knapsack strapped on his back, a thick iron-shod stick in his ungloved hand, wearing also strong ankle-boots and check-trousers well covered with dust. Notwithstanding this lay costume, a carefully-tied cravat betrayed the cleric.

"Capitally delivered, Plynlymmon!" cried the stranger, in apparent ecstasy. "The Eleusinian would have been charmed with you; ay, glad to have listened to his whole trilogy, thus impressively rendered, I have not the slightest doubt. Had he been so employed under cover, his poor pate might have escaped the unlucky bonneter he got from the tortoise, you know."

"Goodness gracious, Mr. Trimmer!" exclaimed the Vicar, apparently much astonished, dropping his eye-glass, and coming forward with outstretched hand, "can it be you?"

"Why, you don't think nature could have produced two Dick Trimmers, do you?" was the

reply, as the dusty traveller commenced a vigorous hand-shaking.

"Well—no, perhaps not. But do you really think I did justice to those wonderful lines?"

"The old soldier could not have spoken them with more effect; although, as we are told, he looked so fierce in his tragic humour that he frightened women and children. But you have a prodigious advantage over the actors of his time, my boy, of which I hope you are sufficiently sensible."

"Oh, indeed; I was not aware. Pray, what is it?"

"Their terrible faces had but one expression. You have no occasion to wear a mask."

"Did I look so very tragic, Mr. Trimmer?"

"Dreadful! and spoke equally so. Indeed, had I been Orestes, and had been abused in that style by the Eumenides, I must have knocked under. Flesh and blood couldn't have stood such a jobation. I should have meekly sung to the old girls:

"Pray, goodies, please to moderate the rancour of your tongues;
Why flash those sparks of fury from your eyes?"

He sang the couplet in a mellow voice and with impressive gesticulation; the Vicar, with a simper of satisfaction looking on, evidently pleased with the doubtful compliment.

"Come in and have some refreshment," he said. "You seem to have had a long walk."

"Only about thirty miles. But I want to look at the inside of your church before I place my legs under your hospitable mahogany."

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon at once opened the gate in the dwarf-paling, and walked with his friend along a narrow path that led to the adjoining churchyard. Mr. Trimmer looked up at the tower, at the roof, at the windows and the walls, with a critical eye.

"Nice place for jackdaws," he cried, as some birds were wheeling round the vane. "I shouldn't wonder if it were the favourite resort of a moping owl or two into the bargain."

and there's a crack by the side of that buttress, that threatens to tumble the entire shabby concern about your ears. It not only is not respectable,—it isn't safe. What on earth is your churchwarden made of, that he should sanction such a scandal?"

"The churchwarden is a pig," replied the Vicar, evidently far from pleased with that functionary.

"A pig, is he?" cried his friend, as they entered the vestry, where the same mouldy smell and damp atmosphere prevailed. "If I were his incumbent, I'd pig him. I'd smoke him into bacon in no time. I'd presently put him into such a pickle as should change the nature of his flesh from his chaps to his pettitoes."

"He always answers my appeals and remonstrances, that the church has done very well as it is these fifty years, and that the parish is too poor to afford to repair it."

"Oh, ho, the pig! As much as to say that the entire congregation is as swinish as himself. Are there no rich farmers or gentry hereabouts?"

"Oh yes, some very well off."

"Any persons of great social influence?"

"Several. In the first place, there's the Duke of Porchester, at the castle. He does not live within the bounds of Delamere Parva, but he's our Lord-Lieutenant, and possesses immense influence in the county, not only from his connexion with it, but because his grace holds high office in the state."

"Good!"

"Then there's the Squire. He owns nearly all Delamere Magna; indeed Delamere Chase extends to this as well as to the neighbouring parishes of Delamere Royal, Birchington, Haresfoot, Foxborough, Heathmere *cum* Tuttle, Coneyhatch, and Warrensfield; nearly the whole of the vale in fact, which, though now smiling hamlets and rich pastures, in the Conqueror's time formed one prodigious forest."

"Any body else?"

"Yes, there's Mrs. Protheroe, the sole representative of the once fine old family that now lie

beneath those brasses you must have noticed in the chancel; and Admiral Proudfoot, descendant of the Sir Percival Proudfoot, whose recumbent figure, with the helmet and breastplate suspended over it, you stopped to examine in the west aisle."

"I tell you what it is, my good fellow," replied the pedestrian, as he put on his wide-awake in leaving the vestry-door, and adjusted his knapsack, "you were always much too easy at college; but here your reconciling yourself to this terrible state of things is a criminal weakness—a decided neglect of your own interests, as well as those of the honourable profession of which you are a member."

"What can I do, Mr. Trimmer?" asked the Vicar helplessly.

"Every thing, Plynlymmon," was the sharp reply. "Have you represented the condition of your church to the Bishop?"

"Oh yes, long ago. His chaplain wrote to say that his lordship was suffering from a bad attack of gout, but promised to bring the matter

before his lordship as soon as the doctors would allow of his lordship attending to business. After a considerable interval I wrote more urgently, and received the same answer, word for word."

"You did, did you! Now, my good fellow, there is but one remedy for this monstrous evil, and you are bound to have recourse to it. I know, were I in your shoes, I would not lose a moment in doing so."

"What is it, Mr. Trimmer? Pray tell me."

"*Agitate!*"

The Vicar repeated the word wonderingly, and stopped in his walk, looking through his eye-glass at his friend, very much as if the latter had been suggesting the propriety of setting fire to his house.

"Call in some eminent surveyor," the latter continued, "and get him to write a report of the unsafe condition of the building, and publish it in the county paper, with a rousing appeal to the county. Did not some local saint of the Middle Ages live hereabouts?"

"Yes, Hildebrand the Hermit. He had been

a crusader, and retired from the world to live a life of meditation and prayer in the very spot where the altar now stands."

"Get up all you can about St. Hildebrand for an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and close with a moving account of the state of the sacred edifice that was raised to do him honour."

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon still stared at his friend.

"Write boldly to the Lord-Lieutenant, to the Bishop, to the Squire, to the representatives of the families whose monuments are in the church, for subscriptions to restore the building to a fit state for the performance of divine worship."

"Subscriptions, Mr. Trimmer!" cried the Vicar, apparently a little perplexed, if not rather frightened.

"Write a pamphlet, preach sermons, make speeches, publish letters in the newspapers, appeal to every body, not in the county only, but antiquarians, scholars, and zealous Protestants throughout the kingdom. Bother the benevolent, worry

the rich, badger the pious wherever you can get at them; and take my word for it you will raise money enough not merely to restore but rebuild your church, with parsonage and schools to match."

"My dear Mr. Trimmer!" exclaimed the Vicar, taking a long breath.

"You've got the finest opportunity for becoming celebrated that any clergyman could desire. It will turn out a precious deal more profitable than editing Greek plays, I can tell you. Leave Æschylus alone, my good fellow. If you were in the habit of getting as deeply into your cups as he did, you might perchance arrive at his fuddled sublimity, but I know you are too abstemious ever to reach his flights. Follow my advice—agitate! agitate!"

"O, Mr. Trimmer!" cried Basil, eagerly. "If you would only stay with me a day or two, so as to put me in the way of conducting this important movement, I should be so very much obliged to you."

The pedestrian smiled his acquiescence.

"Some of my clerical brethren in the neighbourhood are coming to dine with me to-day; but afterwards we shall be entirely by ourselves. Do come."

Mr. Trimmer cheerfully assented; and the college friends returned together to the vicarage: Basil Plynlymmon, unusually excited by the new idea his mind was attempting to grasp, to the total oblivion of the particular work to which it had been devoting its powers; Richard Trimmer, now and then scanning his companion's thoughtful visage, divested of eye-glass, with a half-curious half-amused expression, as he strode beside him, quite content with his prospect of rest and recreation, after his long walk.

"Mrs. Martha!" cried the former, putting his head into an apartment on the ground-floor of his house, whence issued a steam that betrayed its use; "has Mr. Calverley returned?"

An answer was given in the negative by a stout little woman with a glowing face, who stopped some culinary preparation on which she had been

intent, glancing inquisitively at her master's guest, as he stopped at the open door.

The Vicar withdrew, and led the way to a pleasant dressing-room, where the pedestrian was soon briskly employed making such changes in his toilet as the limited wardrobe in his knapsack permitted.

"There be another parson!" muttered Mrs. Martha to a stout little girl with a face as ruddy as her own, who was zealously assisting at the same dresser; "I hopes there'll be enough for 'em all—but I beant sure—some on 'em have sich uncommon twistès o' their own."

This knowledge of the good appetite of her master's clerical guests seemed to give a new impulse to the active, though rather homely-looking cook and housekeeper, and she and her small assistant made increased exertions that the hospitality of the vicarage should suffice for the anticipated demand upon it.

It was at least two or three hours later in the day that a party of gentlemen uniformly dressed

in black suits with white ties, were seated round a dining-table in the vicarage parlour, the wide window of which opened upon the garden already referred to. There was an absence of pretension in the furniture—indeed it was plain, heavy, and worn; the most noticeable thing in it being a large bookcase, that appeared well filled with books, in bindings evidently adapted more for use than show.

The apartment was of a good size; on ordinary occasions, however, it did duty for two: a reception-room, the front division that contained the framed prints—a view of Oxford, another of Westminster Abbey, and two engraved portraits of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York: the other, "the study," held the bookcase surmounted by black busts of Shakspeare and Milton, and had its walls ornamented with maps of different sizes. The doors of separation were now thrown back, and made a comfortable dining-room.

At least it seemed to be so appreciated by the individuals sitting round the table in the cen-

tre. There could be no doubt that they had dined comfortably in it. The appetites referred to in so very homely a way by Mrs. Martha, necessarily sharpened by a long walk, had been satisfied; ample justice had been done to a plain repast; the table had been cleared of what remained; and the clerical host at the head of the table, surrounded by his clerical guests, were left with full decanters and a modest dessert.

They were the leading members of the Delamere Book-Club, whose custom it was to dine at each other's houses once a month. All except Mr. Richard Trimmer, who now, as professionally dressed as the rest, sat near his friend, apparently engaged in close observation of his new acquaintances.

He had been introduced to each in due form, and had shaken hands with them in succession. The little curate of Delamere Magna, in the green spectacles; the stout curate of Delamere Royal, with a cast in his eye; the handsome curate of Birchington, with the fine head of hair; the jo-

vial, farmer-looking old rector of Haresfoot; the facetious young incumbent of Foxborough; the morbidly shy curate of Heathmere *cum* Tuttle; the gaunt, tall, loud-voiced pedant from Coney-hatch; and the sporting parson from Warrensfield; he had marked them all down in his memory, and was still quietly occupying himself with increasing his memoranda.

But though observant, Mr. Trimmer was far from appearing reserved. He had joined so freely in the mild jokes that had circulated during the meal, that his neighbour Mr. Tiddlecup, the established jester of the group, began to fear a rival; whilst his *vis-à-vis*, with so obvious a grand talent for silence, Mr. Bosset, found himself more than once forced into hysterical demonstrations of mirth.

After his survey of the guests Richard Trimmer invariably rested his gaze upon the face of his host. He always found the same furrowed forehead, and an expression even more absorbed than the one he had worn when striving to fathom the profoundest depths of the master of classic tragedy.

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon, however, as his observant friend was well aware, no longer directed his thoughts towards Greek plays; what was far less excusable, he thought almost as little about the more immediate claims upon his attention. His mind was wandering from his duties to the Delamere Book-Club—to a consideration of the much more important obligations he owed to himself. He saw a prospect of greatly improving his position, and already began to be eager to approach it. The question to be answered was, could he venture to take the bold steps for his advancement that had been suggested to him? He thought he could.

Conversation began to be more general; the decanters were passed round, the almonds and raisins distributed, nuts were being cracked and oranges pared. Those who were much in the habit of talking made themselves heard, and those who habitually listened formed the audience.

There was a little learned criticism between Dr. Fusby, head-master of the Coneyhatch Gram-

mar-School, and Mr. Blinkington, tutor to the young Marquis Delamere, and chaplain to his father the Duke of Porchester, which was carried on with much noise and many quotations. There was a lively discussion on psalmody, in which little Jacob Griggs, the good-looking Horatio Drelincourt, and the elderly Dr. Granger took part. There were several puns perpetrated, accidentally to all appearance, by the Rev. Spencer Tiddlecup; and there was an account of a run with Squire Scudamore's hounds from the highly imaginative mind of the Hon. and Rev. Adolphus de Courcy. But a report of these would not be either amusing or edifying.

Suddenly the Vicar seemed to strive vigorously to shake off the sense of responsibility which his wandering speculations had brought upon him, and become sensible of the attention that was due to his guests.

"What's going on at Oxford?" he inquired of his pedestrian friend.

"O, there's quite a new life breathed into the

venerable place," replied Mr. Trimmer, looking intently at the beeswing in the glass of port wine he held up to the light.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Vicar. "What is it all about?"

"You must know, if you are not already aware of this interesting fact, that several earnest-minded men in the Church, impressed with a profound conviction of the unworthy position and comparative inability of its ministry, are striving, by short but powerful appeals to the understanding of Churchmen, to rouse them to united action for the alteration of this unhappy state of things."

The shy Mr. Bosset looked at the speaker with grave attention.

"In what direction, Mr. Trimmer?" inquired his host.

"They remind their readers of the great personal influence enjoyed by the Roman Catholic priest, and insist that the Protestant clergyman should have the same advantages."

"A consummation devoutly to be wished!" observed the little curate of great Delamere; "but far from easy of attainment, to the best of my belief."

"The positions held by the two are only nominally the same," added the curate of Delamere Royal. "Both are pastors, but their flocks are very differently trained."

"Of course, of course," said the Vicar.

"The argument is," continued Mr. Trimmer, "that care should be taken by the Protestant pastor to assimilate the training of his flock as closely as possible to that which produces the better-ordered fold."

The shy curate became still more attentive.

"Moreover," he added, "our religious services have for a long time been performed, we are assured, in a negligent manner, without the slightest respect for the Rubric, and it is recommended that we should return to its strictest observance."

"Do they want us to adopt the Popish prac-

tices swept away by the Reformation?" demanded Dr. Fusby in his loudest tones.

"I am decidedly opposed to any thing of the kind," added the Vicar mildly.

"They remind us," continued Mr. Trimmer, without seeming to heed these interruptions, "that the Church of England is not of Popish origin, for that our Christianity came in long before St. Augustine, and was not imported from Rome; consequently that we cannot do better than fall back upon the ritual of the primitive Anglican Christians."

Some of the auditory seemed struck with this argument; the shy curate evincing the deepest interest.

"An ancient British Church no doubt existed," observed Mr. Blinkington; "but the principal portion of our ritual is of much later date."

"There can be no question about it," said Dr. Fusby authoritatively. "Our faith was thoroughly Romish till Henry the Eighth threw off the fetters of the Pope."

"I have always opposed Popish practices," added the Vicar; "but if the bishops before St. Augustine—"

Then ensued a discussion upon Church antiquities. The idea of a pre-Augustine Anglican Church was agreeable to the majority, particularly those most averse from Popery.

But the conversation respecting the tenets advocated by the Tractarians did not end here. Questions were asked that elicited further information respecting them; and more than one of the younger clergymen present expressed an intention of sending for the publications in which they had been set forth.

The head-master of the Coneyhatch Grammar-School affected to treat the whole affair as a new development of Popery; but among those not inclined to adopt such an impression was the Rev. Basil Plynlymmon. No Protestant clergyman had been in the habit of preaching more strongly against "the scarlet abomination;" this antagonism, however, made him more eager to adopt the

idea of an Anglo-Catholic Church; and throughout the rest of the evening he was one of the most eager inquirers after the new doctrines and their authors.

The party broke up early, as some of them had a long walk or a long ride home; but there were few present on whom the communications of Mr. Trimmer did not exert a powerful and lasting influence. With the vicar this was peculiarly the case. The previous suggestions of his college friend had given an impulse to his thoughts which had prepared his mind for the reception of the impressions that followed.

Ready as he was to entertain the subject more thoroughly, he did not lose sight of his present responsibilities. He had no sooner closed the door on the last of his guests than he again demanded of Mrs. Martha whether his pupil had returned. The answer he had before received was repeated.

"I suppose he's at his uncle's; but he ought to have written to me. He's been away an entire

week. To-morrow I will send to the Grange to make inquiries."

Satisfying himself with this determination, he gave orders for fastening up the house, and then returned to the parlour.

The confidential conference that followed lasted for several hours; indeed, did not conclude till long after midnight. It must have been deeply interesting to have detained a man so regular in his habits as the Vicar so late into the small hours. It was not less important, as the results proved. The Rev. Basil Plynlymmon from that date became an altered man.

The mission of Mr. Richard Trimmer was in a fair way of accomplishment.

CHAPTER III.

HONEST JACK SCUDAMORE.

Day after day passed by, and Arthur Calverley was perfectly aware that he was progressing towards convalescence. He was as satisfied with his quarters as with his treatment. He had become reconciled to the harsh physiognomy of Sister Gudule; for he was obliged to acknowledge that, despite the repellent expression of her face, there never was a more skilful or a more attentive nurse. The most nourishing viands were provided for him, though fasting as well as other habits of self-denial rigidly prevailed among his pious entertainers.

The superior visited him every day, and conversed with him more kindly at each visit, evidently desirous of gratifying every reasonable

wish he might express. She never again alluded to his mother; but there could be no doubt that the youth was treated by her with so much confidence in consequence of his near relationship to the friend of her youth. More than once he attempted to turn the conversation in this direction, but found that she carefully avoided all reference to worldly topics connected with her personal history. This reserve, natural as it was, served only to increase the mystery in which all that related to her and her interesting community seemed to be involved, consequently Arthur Calverley could do nothing but speculate, which in truth he did with as fruitful an imagination as ever was possessed by a youth of seventeen.

The convent-pupil did not again approach him, but he found opportunities of seeing her every day; indeed many times a-day and night also, without her being aware of it. By going out of his chamber, which was Sister Gudule's cell, he was able to look into the oratory, where the nuns assembled to perform their devotional exercises,

and could always observe that fair young face beaming with the fervour of true piety, for it was easily distinguishable among the kneeling throng.

He never missed an opportunity of witnessing their self-inflicted penances, or their ordinary forms of worship; but his great gratification was to watch them at midnight, when the moon illumined the beautiful arches, and rendered visible the multitude of grotesque carvings that projected from the surrounding darkness. Monstrous faces were thus made to look down on the absorbed worshippers, like demons maliciously watching and deriding their devotion. In particular there was a dragon's-head doing duty as a gargoyle, that might easily have been taken for the contorted visage of the great enemy of souls.

The singing, which usually accompanied the midnight prayers of the good sisters, sounded peculiarly sweet, and the effect was heightened by the additional voices of two or three nightingales from the adjoining grove, that seemed to accept the swelling hymn as a challenge, and did

their utmost in melodious rivalry. The combination was singularly pleasant, indeed had something in it holy as well as pleasing, and young Calverley continued to listen while the performance lasted with as profound a religious sentiment as probably influenced either of the nuns, notwithstanding the incongruous association of the demoniac physiognomies that he could not help observing in the carved stone-work above them.

When concentrating his attention on Felicia he felt like a devotee gazing on the features of a glorified saint. Her graceful figure in the habit of a pupil, as it fell into the attitudes of supplication, thanksgiving, praise, or penitence, gave him the idea of a Raffaelle *chef-d'œuvre;* but when he raised his eyes from this exquisite natural altar-piece he was sure to encounter the grinning gargoyle and the grotesque bosses, apparently deriding his admiration.

One afternoon he was at his post of observation about the time of compline, when he heard a suppressed exclamation; and turning quickly

round, beheld the youthful *religieuse* close to him, with the utmost embarrassment and alarm visible in her ingenuous countenance. The two gazed on each other silently for a few seconds; but short as was the time, it is impossible to express the intensity, the depth, the exquisiteness of the sensations one of them experienced.

The girl sunk on her knees trembling, and, seizing her rosary, began hurriedly and excitedly to say her customary Latin prayers; her look still fixed on the face of the handsome youth as if she could not take it away, her countenance flushed and anxious. To allay her evident alarm he knelt beside her, and repeated aloud the Credo she was murmuring abstractedly to herself. A radiant smile played like a gleam of sunshine over her angelic features as she recognised this communion of worship. She turned her head. She stopped, and her lips parted as if about to speak.

At this moment the clear commanding voice previously heard sounded from below.

"Felicia!"

Like a startled bird she rose at the summons, directed a sweet, pleased, half-tender glance towards her fellow-worshipper, and hurriedly fluttered out of sight.

And so the time passed far from unpleasantly. To Arthur there was a delightful mystery in his residence, and he was not at all inclined to alter it. But a change was coming sooner than he expected, or wished.

One morning, shortly after matins, he was sitting on his bed reading a devotional book, when his attention was taken off the narrative of a very remarkable miracle by the sound of voices in conversation. Above the head of his pallet was the deal partition which divided the cell of Sister Gudule from another, and close against it must have sat or stood the superior, for it was her voice he recognised.

"Dorothy is unfortunately a thorough woman of the world," she observed. "So she was during my association with her; and so, unless the good God touches that temple of vanity, her heart, she

is, I am afraid, likely to remain. She has made an idol, you tell me, of her dead husband, whom she worships with a reverence that should be due only to God and the Blessed Virgin."

Something was said in reply, in a man's voice; but the speaker was apparently too far off, or spoke too low, to be heard distinctly.

"Yes; her thoughts, her hopes, her recollections begin and end at court," said the Abbess. "In her intense state of worldliness she considers that there is nothing worthy of notice beyond its privileged circle. The royal family take the places of the heavenly hierarchy in her Paradise, and the members of the household those of the holy martyrs and saints. In truth, my poor sister is in a terrible condition, and I pray for her lost soul night and day. Protestant she may call herself, but Christian she certainly is not."

Again Arthur could not make out the reply; but the communication must have been a long one, for it was some time before he again heard the voice with which he was familiar. During this interval

his mind was busy speculating on the strange occurrence of a man penetrating to this refuge for female recluses; and he could attribute it only to their religious requirements. The stranger could be no other, he thought, than the appointed father confessor to the sisters. He immediately portrayed him as a venerable ecclesiastic of solemn appearance and grave demeanour, qualified by a life of strict integrity to undertake so onerous a trust. The good priest must of course have come to receive the confessions of the pious community.

Arthur Calverley wondered what faults the noble-looking superior could have committed since his last visit. What offence could the rigid Sister Gudule have to divulge, he asked himself. Could it be necessary that Felicia should have to declare her most secret thoughts and emotions to this man, was another and a more earnest query. He became painfully anxious to know more of this visitor. A feverish curiosity kept him a breathless listener.

"I cannot reconcile myself to her being per-

mitted to bring up that child," were the first words that reached him. "She will be educated as a Protestant, which is of course an insurmountable objection with a good Catholic like myself; but there is also the grave evil in prospect of her being educated exclusively for the world. I am afraid that my poor sister has no religious principles of any sort, and therefore cannot teach any to her charge. It is really terrible to contemplate the evils that must result from my niece being committed to her care. She might, I think, have been contented with making one of the cousins a heretic; the other ought, in common fairness, to have been delivered over to me, when she would have had the unspeakable advantage of a thoroughly religious training, associated with Felicia."

The youth's heart beat more quickly at that name, and he became so agitated that the Breviary he had held dropped from his hand on to the floor. The voice stopped at once, and sunk into an inaudible whisper.

What could this strange conference be about, he thought. The Abbess was not making a confession; the priest was not offering absolution. They were evidently talking of an elderly lady who had taken upon herself the charge of two girls, each apparently professing a faith differing from their own.

There seemed to him something singularly mysterious in such a colloquy, carried on in such a place. Who could be "Dorothy?" who were her wards? and what had Felicia to do with them? These questions presented themselves in quick succession, but of course remained unanswered. He knew nothing, and could suggest nothing by way of explanation.

Where, he asked himself, could he look for information? Not from the stern-featured Sister Gudule. Her vow of silence was an impassable obstacle, and her disposition he knew to be the reverse of communicative. Not from the tender, graceful Felicia. He could not dare to ask her a worldly question, even should an opportunity pre-

sent itself. Not from that patrician-looking superior of the sisterhood. Not for worlds could he have risked her condemnation of his inquisitiveness.

Had he any prospect of meeting the priest? Was there the most remote possibility of the latter becoming sociable with him? Might not the reverend gentleman be induced to tell him what he knew of these amiable recluses, particularly of the pupil, and of her connection with the Protestant lady and the two Protestant girls the latter had undertaken to educate? To his youthful mind this idea seemed not only rational but practicable.

While surrendering his imagination to these suggestions, he was startled by hearing his name. He listened intently.

"He can now be removed with safety; and I am anxious, for several reasons, that this should be attempted at once. I think I have done enough for him to prove my affection for his dead mother, and to satisfy the claims of Christian charity. I

have no complaint to make against him beyond a pardonable curiosity—indeed, I have marked qualities in him that have won my respect. But Felicia—"

His youthful heart beat again tumultuously as he drew his head nearer to the partition, but the voice sunk into a whisper. He heard no more.

It was quite clear to him that he was now to be got rid of with all convenient despatch; and the information was by no means agreeable. Notwithstanding the narrowness of his cell, the melancholy prospect from the window, the stern severity of Sister Gudule, and her association with the terrible scene he had witnessed in the moonlit cemetery, he loved the place and all it contained. Every fragment of the grand ruin was endeared to him. He had a regard even for the grotesque heads in the carved stone-work, and had become quite reconciled to the demoniac dragon that grinned so horribly from the top of the broken wall.

The sweet singing of the nuns, and the equally plaintive choral of their melodious sisters, the nightingales, how could he tear himself from them? And then Felicia—going from her seemed turning his back on heaven.

Such was his excitement at the prospect of quitting the temporary lodging the estimable lady superior had provided for him, while he so greatly needed careful nursing, that, could he have secured a continuance in his quarters, he would have declared himself a Catholic without the slightest hesitation. He felt assured, however, that such a change would be of no service to him in the only way he desired assistance. Luckily for him, he was in honourable hands that would not have permitted such a perversion from romantic motives.

While he was intent on these suggestions, the Abbess entered his chamber. He rose as usual to receive her with a reverential salutation, and looking into her noble face discerned more emotion than he had ever yet noticed there. The calm serene gaze appeared troubled, the clear eye

dim, and when she spoke her voice trembled with emotion.

"My son," she said, with an earnest gravity in her look and manner he remembered long afterwards, "the good God sent you amongst us poor recluses that we might show ourselves worthy of serving our divine Lord and example; and the Blessed Virgin has helped us, and enabled us to fulfil what was both a duty and a trust. You will now go forth again into the world from which we are secluded; I hope not without thankfulness to that Providence which raised you up friends in your utmost need—not too, let me hope, without a grateful recollection of the poor sisters, who, under that Providence, were the means of helping you through a mortal struggle."

The youth knelt at her feet and kissed her hand. She placed the other on his head and uttered a benediction.

"A friend is waiting to take you away," she continued presently. "But before you depart, you must promise not to return on any pretext

whatever, and to say nothing respecting the existence of our little community here."

He gave the required promise with a full heart and a choking utterance. The Abbess embraced him like a mother, and then led him silently out of the cell.

As Arthur walked along the different portions of the abbey through which he was conducted, he glanced at the old familiar faces in the carved work as upon friends he was leaving after much pleasant acquaintance. He felt a consolation in knowing that he was about to be presented to the priest whose voice he had so recently heard in conference with his companion, from whom he hoped to obtain much interesting information; but on reaching the great arched entrance, it is impossible to express his surprise on finding there, as if waiting his approach, not a grave white-headed mild-featured ecclesiastic in a neat suit of black, but a ruddy-faced, stout-limbed Cheshire squire, in a green coat, buff waistcoat, leather small top-boots, and velvet hunting-cap.

It was Jack Scudamore,—honest Jack Scudamore, as he was called all over the country,—the proprietor of Delamere Court—a master of hounds, a breeder of race-horses, and one of the greatest patrons of field-sports in the three kingdoms.

He was sitting on a fine horse, as only a thorough-bred sportsman can sit a thorough-bred animal, with the bridle of "Trusty" in one of his hands. Arthur looked amazed. Glancing at the youth with a half-solemn, half-comic look, he burst out into a cheery laugh.

"Mount," said he, "there's a good chap; and don't stare as if you took me for a ghost. I'm solid flesh and blood, near fifteen stone; and can beat all the light-weights in the saddle, and all the heavy-weights hereabouts in a fair turn-up, single-stick, boxing, wrestling—whatever they like. By Jove! if you ever catch a ghost as substantial as Jack Scudamore, you may make a fortune by showing him at fairs."

Arthur looked around for the Abbess, but she had disappeared. The contrast of her appearance

to that of his present associate, and of her pious conversation to his emphatic but somewhat too secular talk, struck him very forcibly. Indeed, he was so astonished, that he had not a word to say. He was, however, on the back of his favourite in a moment, and was presently cantering, evidently well pleased, through a broad cartway in the neighbouring wood, by the side of the Squire's hunter.

"You see, my lad," he said, pointing with his hunting-whip over his shoulder in the direction of the place they had just left, "those poor ladies, a few years ago, left their convent abroad; and I was persuaded to let them fit up the old abbey as a temporary shelter, the superior being a relation of mine. But there's a good deal of 'no-popery' animosity in these parts, so we thought it best to keep their residence there as much a secret as possible. By George, sir, there's bigots in this very parish as wouldn't mind getting up a riot for the sole purpose of having their hiding-place burnt about their ears,"

Arthur warmly expressed his indignation, and an assurance that their secret was safe in his hands. The idea at once presented itself to him that here was the opportunity he had longed for, to learn something reliable respecting those amiable recluses to whom he felt so deeply indebted. He thought too that he had a better chance of gaining the much-desired intelligence from a layman than from a priest. His new friend looked the personification of perfect frankness and hearty good-humour; the imaginary father confessor would of course have been reserved, probably would have regarded his inquiries with distrust.

Arthur glanced up at Jack Scudamore's honest English face, and felt his courage and his hopes increase. The fox-hunter laughed again his cheery laugh at the youth's earnest scrutiny.

"I hope you'll know me when we next meet," he observed with hearty jocularity. "You look as closely at me as I do at a horse I want to buy. And what do you think of my points? You don't take me for a screw, do you?"

The air of mock alarm with which this inquiry was put so tickled Arthur's fancy, that he could not repress his mirth; the other encouraged the joke with boisterous delight.

"You think that I'm only fit for the knackers, eh?" he demanded. "The high-mettled racer, Jack Scudamore, isn't able to draw a sand-cart? Confound you! I'll let you know presently that I've blood and bone for any thing! I tell you what, sir: I'm engaged to ride a steeple-chase, and you shall soon see the stuff I'm made of."

The idea of a steeple-chase at once drove the good nuns out of the youth's head. He became eager and inquisitive, and showed all a boy's enthusiasm for so exciting a race.

"You see there's a young fellow called Dillon," he continued. "Like most Irishmen, he fancies he knows something about horses, which poor dull John Bull has no notion of; and he's come down here with a famous steeple-chaser, Brian Boru, —an Irish horse, of course,—as well known at the Curragh of Kildare as I am in this county. Well,

a few of us have agreed, for a thousand guineas, to ride across a certain line of country—by Jove! sir, about the most trying mile or two that ever taxed the powers of horseflesh—against this wonderful fencer."

Arthur's heart was in a flutter of excitement.

"There's Lord Vernon's Peter Pindar, out of Sister to Smolensko; Lord Rossborough's Black-eyed Susan, that has won at least half-a-dozen cups in the North; the Duke of Porchester's famous chestnut-mare Phyllis, whose sire was the Arabian Godolphin; Sir Harry Chester's Conjuror, out of Coventry Bess; Tom Holyoake's Saucy Lass, that won, you know, the hurdle-race at Durham."

The youth knew nothing about it; but prudently refrained from exposing his ignorance.

"Lastly, there is my magnificent gray stallion Jupiter, brother to Thunderbolt, that won the Derby and the Oaks last season. There isn't better blood in the three kingdoms. I gave a deuce of a price for him when a yearling, and

have had him trained under my own eye. Such power! such action! such speed! such a shape! By George, sir, if he don't beat any Irish horse that ever was foaled, I'll eat him—shoes and all."

Arthur joined in the hearty laugh that followed this declaration, and felt an increasing interest in an event of such sporting importance.

"Well, sir, we have made up a purse of a thousand guineas to try the mettle of Brian Boru. Young Dillon is to ride him—indeed every owner is to ride his particular steed; and as they are among the best gentlemen jockeys in the county, I have no doubt that they will show our friend Paddy some pretty play."

It is impossible to express the eager desire Arthur Calverley felt to see the impending struggle. It put every other idea completely out of his mind.

"But the fences and the brooks he will have to cross," he continued, with a grin of the most intense satisfaction, "the double hedges, the

shelving banks, the high palings, and broad ditches he will be forced to go over neck or nothing,—by George, Paddy will have his work to do! Why, sir, we start from Highbury Hollow, over the mill-stream at Mornington Flats, into Sparsingham Lane, cross the old fosse at the Roman encampment, turn by the gap, and take the wall by the orchard into the Friar's Close, leap the river by the willow-bank, then go up the Lover's Mound, over the enclosure at the Seven Acres, and down the slope, and across the ditch and palings into the Parson's Field to the flag. If the Emerald Isle can show such a line of country as that, there may be the ghost of a chance for Brian Boru; for the Irish horse may have had some preparation for the work that has been cut out for him. But, my lad, it isn't possible. I don't believe that there's such a succession of leaps in any hunting country in the world."

They were skirting the edge of the Mere, and then turned off into a high-banked green lane

with tall trees on each side that united at top in a natural arch. It formed a singularly pleasant and refreshing picture; and a small flock of sheep in the centre with their smock-frocked shepherd and his shaggy dog approaching, added to its picturesque character.

"Hallo, Giles!" cried the Squire, riding up before the man, as the latter respectfully doffed his coarse straw-hat. "Hast seen any body as ye came along?"

"Ees, Squire; a power o' gentlefolk," replied the shepherd eagerly. "They be all in the Hollow; riding back'ards and forrards loike mad. It seemed to I there was going to be a race loike."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the Squire, winking at his young friend. "Come on, my lad. Don't let us be too late for the fun."

They soon left the flock behind, as well as their shepherd, scratching his head with open mouth as he stared after them; and emerged upon a straggling piece of waste land that shortly

began to sink gradually into a narrow dell. Arthur caught sight of a group of animated equestrians below, and his heart began to beat more rapidly with excitement as he took in the more prominent features of the scene. Indeed a picture so exciting he had never beheld.

He could easily discern the gentlemen jockeys in their various-coloured vests and gay caps; there were also members of the Delamere Hunt in their scarlet coats, as well as other gentlemen and farmers of the neighbourhood in blue or green coats. They rode from one group to another, or tried the pace of their steeds, or their powers of leaping, and the sounds of their shouting and laughing floated merrily on the air.

As soon as the Squire was recognised, a hundred eager cries of welcome arose, and a good many of the throng rode forward, apparently eager to be the first to shake him by the hand. Nothing could exceed the joyousness of spirit which pervaded the scene; and the dash of recklessness that the majority of the best mounted

exhibited as they urged their horses forward, gave it a wonderful charm in the youth's eyes.

"Jack," cried one of the oldest of the riders, though the vivacity in his clear gray eyes, and the hilarity expressed in his cheerful countenance, declared unmistakably that his heart was still young,—"Jack, old boy, I'm delighted to see you."

They shook hands with such heartiness that the powder which the speaker wore in the abundant fashion of his youth flew out of his carefully-dressed head and fell in a shower over his shoulders.

"I'm sorry if I've kept you waiting, Duke," was the reply.

Arthur knew that he was looking upon the Duke of Porchester, the lord-lieutenant of the county, a distinguished patron of field-sports, and moreover a leading member of the government. He knew too that his grace was held in as high estimation for the courteous urbanity of his manners as for his political influence.

"Arrah, then, there you are, honey!" shouted

one of the most dashing of the jockeys, coming up smacking his whip with the most extravagant demonstrations of delight. "Long life to ye! It's mighty glad I am ye're come, Mr. Jack Scudamore dear; for it's in a bit of a quandary I'm in, and I can't see my way out of it, at all, at all."

"The fact is, Squire," observed a handsome aristocratic-looking man joining the group, with a laughing face, "my young friend Dillon has, in his eagerness to maintain the reputation of Brian Boru, forgotten his owner; so I have been obliged to come forward to claim that honour, and shall of course ride the horse in the race."

"I don't see that we lose much by that, my lord," exclaimed the Squire in his most cordial manner, grasping the hand of the acknowledged proprietor of the celebrated Irish horse, a member of the peerage of the same country, and well known on the turf. "Our greatest loss will be Mr. Dillon as a competitor."

"And I do not see that that is imperative," observed the Duke, good-humouredly.

"Suppose we come to an agreement, Duke, that one of us should be permitted to resign his horse to Mr. Dillon?"

The suggestion was eagerly adopted by that gentleman, but by nobody else. It was evidently accepted as an exceedingly pleasant joke, and gave rise to an abundance of jocose bantering and peals of hearty laughter. But either no one felt inclined to trust his thoroughbred to young Dillon's jockeyship, or could not be persuaded to give up his personal share in the forthcoming race. There was no response to the appeal.

"If there is no objection to it, Mr. Dillon shall ride Phyllis," said the Duke.

The idea was welcomed with acclamation, and the popular lord-lieutenant of the county had the satisfaction of seeing that he had won golden opinions in an influential circle, while gracefully withdrawing from a contest that could scarcely fail of being attended by a good deal of personal risk. The Duke of Porchester passed for a clever man.

This alteration in the programme having been satisfactorily settled, such of the competitors in the forthcoming steeple-chase as had not yet displayed their racing-costume threw off their coats and appeared in satin jackets of various colours, with caps to match.

Arthur had ample opportunity for noticing both horses and riders as they took up their positions preliminary to the start.

Lord Vernon was a thin young man with a well-defined aquiline nose, and rather high cheek-bones. He rode a powerful black horse.

Lord Rossborough was about the same age. His face was round but inexpressive. An air of languid indifference seemed impressed upon it; but now and then a peculiar keen look in his dark eyes showed that he took a more than ordinary interest in what was going on. He rode a roan mare that had attained considerable local celebrity.

Dillon attracted a good deal of the youth's attention; the confident, rollicking, droll, devil-may-care Irish adventurer was there beyond a

doubt. He rode a chestnut mare of wide celebrity in the county.

Sir Harry Chester was only remarkable for the length of his legs, and the paleness of his complexion. He was a dragoon-officer, but knew little of the service, and cared less; he was an exquisite, much better known in St. James's Street than at the Horse Guards. He rode a bay gelding of promising appearance.

Mr. Holyoake was nephew to the bishop of the diocese, and, as his rubicund physiognomy too plainly showed, was more familiar with the port-wine of the county than with its church establishment. The mare he rode was another Cheshire celebrity, but from the fineness of her shape better qualified for racing than leaping.

Whatever merits these animals had, Arthur soon perceived that the opinions of the best judges were nearly equally divided between the Irish horse and that of his friend the Squire. When the owner of Brian Boru rode forward, there was a buz of admiration from all the knowing ones in

horse-flesh. He was a gelding of extraordinary size and strength, unquestionably too of high spirit. Even when Jupiter came playfully curvetting and caracolling with his owner on his back, his magnificent figure failed to lessen the impression Brian Boru had created. Bets were now shouted out with the greatest possible animation, and when accepted were rapidly written down in pocket-books. Seven to six were freely offered by the friends of the Irish horse; those of the Cheshire stallion were equally liberal in his favour; seven to four were betted against Phyllis; eight to three against Peter Pindar and Black-eyed Susan; and six to four against Conqueror and Saucy Lass.

The cries of the betting-men, the ribald oaths, the coarse jokes that were bandied about by the excited throng, formed a striking contrast to the tranquil solitude and holy purity of the retreat Arthur had just left; yet his youthful love of sport was so strongly excited by the scene before him, that he completely forgot all he had seen

and heard so short a time before, that was most worthy of remembrance. Even the sweet face of Felicia had passed from his recollection.

At a signal all started, young Dillon taking the lead; but, alas, Phyllis did not clear the mill-stream, and her rider got such a ducking as ought to have cooled the courage even of an Irishman. He had presently a companion in misfortune in Sir Harry Chester; the rest got over well: Peter Pindar a little in advance; Black-eyed Susan, Conqueror, and Saucy Lass following closely; and Brian Boru and Jupiter slightly in the rear.

Trusty could not be restrained; and though Arthur had been cautioned by the Squire not to join in the race with his arm scarcely set, he could as little be restrained as his horse. So off they started. He however had the prudence to follow a practicable line that other horsemen had selected.

Along Sparsingham Lane Conqueror showed in front; but he stumbled over the old fosse and

threw his rider. In taking the wall down went Peter Pindar. Crossing the Friar's Close the Irish horse was seen pressing forward, closely waited on by the Cheshire stallion. At the river Black-eyed Susan missed her footing and fell back; it was cleared by Saucy Lass, Brian Boru, and Jupiter.

The three now passed up the Lover's Mound, at the end of which they came to a terrible stiff bull-finch, which the mare refused. The Irish horse went over in fine style; Jupiter was equally successful, but about three lengths in the rear. Then ensued a tearing race between the two favourites, through the seven-acre field and down the slope—Brian Boru still leading.

The worst leap was to come—a stiff ox-fence, with a ditch. The Irish horse was seen going at it at a tremendous pace; but whether his rider made him take it at too great a distance, or whether he slipped when descending the slope, is not known. All that the closest observers saw was, that he fell in the ditch, throwing his rider on

his head. Jupiter flew over his prostrate competitor, and, galloping along the field beyond, won the race amid the deafening acclamations of the spectators, among whom Arthur was one of the most vociferous.

There was one serious drawback to the intense satisfaction which the issue of this race gave the Squire and his delighted neighbours. This was the fate of the noble owner of Brian Boru. The Viscount was picked up a corpse. Dillon's grief at the loss of his patron was uncontrollable; Arthur was very much shocked, yet he was unaware how profound an influence over his career, his life, his happiness, that dreadful event was to exercise.

Seeing the Squire absorbed in sorrow at the fate of his late competitor, Arthur thought it better to ride to the vicarage without attempting to take leave.

CHAPTER IV.

A LORD-CHAMBERLAIN'S WIDOW.

ARTHUR CALVERLEY was enjoying a favourite out-of-door recreation on a lovely summer afternoon —going with the tide over the silent highway of the then silvery Thames, just dipping the blades of the oars to keep the boat in her course. It was quite as pleasant for a contemplative man's recreation as the sport he had an opportunity of observing, as he passed punt after punt, poled in mid-stream, with a fat citizen in a straw-hat, nankeen-jacket, gaiters, and other business-like habiliments, watching through his spectacles the motion of his float with as much anxiety as if he expected to hook a shark instead of a gudgeon.

The river at this time was free from steamers, and its wave from the thousand pollutions with

which it is now poisoned; the water was sparkling, the fish plentiful, and the banks picturesque. There was no exercise more refreshing and invigorating than a pull of an hour or two over its sparkling current — especially to an idle young fellow beginning to feel the weariness of town dissipation.

In the days to which I am referring there were no outriggers. The regular waterman's boat was employed by amateurs, only it was of lighter construction for a single rower, who had recourse to the ordinary oars, if he prided himself, in the slightest degree, on his skill or his strength. A long pull, therefore, particularly if against tide, required considerable exertion; nevertheless, it was sought as a special enjoyment by all classes of lusty youth—from the apprentice at Wapping to the patrician school-boy at Westminster—even more generally than at present.

Many a load of joyous holiday-makers did the youth pass returning to town, laughing, screaming, and singing, totally oblivious of the slight

margin between the deep water and the cranky gunwale; and many a gaily-painted wherry, rendered more conspicuous by its group of smart parasols shading smarter bonnets, that a modern milliner would only condescend to look at as caricatures,

Arthur took his solitary way in a very leisurely manner. He was not unmindful of the pleasant features of the scene; but the sense of security that pervaded every thing around him brought with it a delicious feel of repose, and the flow of his thoughts became as tranquil as the river on which he floated. Yet he could not help being a little dissatisfied with himself at this tranquillity. He know that it was time for action, and that he was wasting in unprofitable pleasure the energies that ought to be carrying him forward in the first stage of a noble career.

He looked at his position more closely than he had hitherto thought necessary. What was he at best, he asked himself; the cadet of an ancient family, with but little to boast of in the present,—

a very insecure foundation for the future he desired. He had quitted his tutor, and had been studying a year at a military college, preparing himself for the duties of a cavalry officer. A commission had been promised him; and in the interim he enjoyed his leisure in the indulgence of a favourite recreation.

A breeze was now springing up, that began to stir the hitherto calm surface beneath him. It was any thing but welcome to the overladen boats slowly advancing with their freight of noisy revellers; but the more heavy craft, bearing piles of timber and other merchandise, were seen busily spreading their huge sails to obtain the advantage of its influence.

He was carelessly gliding along within a convenient distance of the bank at Chiswick, when he observed a new wherry leaving a private landing, pushed out by a handsome boy in a glazed hat, white trousers and pink shirt-sleeves. The boat carried one passenger—a girl at least a year younger than her companion, who sat in a gipsy hat

adorned with blue ribbons, out of which fell a shower of golden curls, that surrounded the loveliest face he had ever beheld—except one.

In her close-fitting spencer and flowing skirt, bound round the waist with a broad sash, she looked so delicate, graceful, and fairy-like, with a sense of dignity evidently struggling with a feeling of timidity in the bright glances she threw hurriedly around her, that he could not but fix his attention on so very pleasing a picture. They were evidently brother and sister; and the boy was as proud of his charge as the girl of his guidance.

As the boat came into deep water the young amateur waterman flung his pole in, sat down on his bench, threw out a pair of skulls, rapidly fixed them in the rowlocks, and, with a nod at his companion, a flash of triumph from his bright eyes, and a very merry speech, proceeded to pull from the shore.

"Ah," thought Arthur, as he turned away from the charming spectacle to look after his own course, "a stolen pleasure; and the enjoy-

ment not the less for being dashed with apprehension."

He did not know which most to admire—the confidence of the one, or the modest dignity of the other. A laugh like a peal of silver bells was borne to him by the wind. Nothing could be sweeter than its tone; and it was as full of happiness as of courage. "Long," said he, "may your young life be as joyous as at this moment!"

Suddenly a chorus of men's shouts and women's screams startled him out of his tranquillity. He turned round, with his oars uplifted.

"Gracious God, she's gone!" cried a woman in a boat full of holiday people, who seemed frantic with excitement.

"She's sinking!"

"Help! help! the boat's upset!"

"They're both in the water!"

"They'll be drowned! they'll be drowned!"

These, with a score of similar exclamations, came from the excited people in a cutter that was passing Arthur Calverley, her six oars hav-

ing given her great speed notwithstanding the number of her passengers. A hurried glance showed Arthur the pretty boat bottom upwards, and the boy scrambling up the black sides of a heavy coal-barge with a huge brown sail, going before the wind. Of the girl nothing was visible but the straw-bonnet, and its gay strings floating on the tide.

A few strong and rapid strokes brought his boat round in time for him to discern a pale face gleaming through the green surface. Another burst of eager shouts and exclamations rang in his ears as the head rose into sight. He speedily shipped his oars, sprung to his feet, and made a plunge. He dived as the pale face was disappearing, and succeeded in obtaining a firm grip on the wet clothes.

Presently he rose to the surface and looked about. His own boat was floating away; but others were approaching, drawn to the spot by the continuous shouting and screams. He lifted his burthen into the first that came up, jumped

in immediately after, and bade the waterman row as quickly as possible to the landing from which he had seen the brother and sister take the water.

What an awful change had passed over his feelings within the last few moments—from the blissful calm that had been produced by the sight of life brimming over with the innocent and exquisite sensations of happy, careless childhood, to the immediate presence of the dark shadow which had shrouded what seemed to him one of the brightest objects in nature!

It would have been in vain for any one to have reminded him that the drowned child he held in his arms was nothing to him—was neither kindred, nor friend, nor even acquaintance; that a few minutes before he had no knowledge whatever of her reality; and that he had not incurred the slightest responsibility by her terribly sudden death. Those few most eventful minutes had sufficed to establish acquaintance, friendship, kindred, as near as life can ever be to death.

He felt as though she had been all he had ever

seen in nature that was worth knowing; and the accusation that he had been indifferent to her danger,—that he had never uttered one word of caution that might have prevented the catastrophe, smote him with indescribable anguish.

He looked down upon the pallid face, half concealed by the mass of tangled hair that clung to it, and recalling the clustering curls, the silvery laugh, and the intense sense of childish happiness that had so lately filled it with sunshine, he seemed overpowered by an agony of self-reproach. At that moment a something between a gasp and a sigh came from between the blue lips.

"She ain't gone, sir," said the old boatman. "I've seen many corpses taken out of the river in my time, and therefore knows when there's as much as a spark o' life left, and when it's all been drownded out. If so be the young lady is properly looked to at once, take my word for 't, sir, she'll recover; but if them remedies be delayed, the poor little thing won't have a ghost of a chance."

The boat grounded, and Arthur sprang up the

steps with his burthen in his arms, oblivious of every thing but the vital necessity of speed. He found himself on a well-kept lawn, divided by flower-beds from a pretty green-verandahed house, built in what was then considered the ornate cottage style; but he had neither time nor inclination to notice its architecture particularly; for as he rushed along the gravel-walk in frantic haste, there met him a group, principally of women, screaming and displaying every demonstration of the wildest terror, as they hurried from the house.

A short gentlemanly man, with sharp intelligent features, appeared to be the only person amongst them who had possession of his senses. Arthur could hear him giving orders, with as much presence of mind as authority.

"Jane, get hot-water for a bath directly. Mrs. Jenkins, have a bed warmed ready for immediate use. Elizabeth, tell your mistress to send me stimulants and blankets as quickly as possible."

But the women appeared to have lost their

heads, and came flying towards the dripping youth with their cap ribbons streaming in the wind, crying and wringing their hands, evidently in the most helpless state of alarm.

They wanted to take his burthen from him, but he quickly passed by them, and carried her towards the person whom he took to be the master of the house. The latter held out his arms to receive her, gazing upon the marble features with anxious scrutiny; then repeated his orders in a more peremptory tone. This time Jane, Mrs. Jenkins, and Elizabeth heard them, and in a very flurried manner rushed away.

A little within the porch Arthur could discern the figure of a venerable lady in spectacles, leaning upon a stick, apparently peering towards him. To her the servants now fled as frantically as they had a minute before directed their flight towards the stranger.

The gentleman took the still-dripping child, and immediately followed in the same direction. Arthur was left standing on the path, his clothes

making a fast-growing pool on the gravel. Every one had disappeared into the house. In the general excitement, his being overlooked seemed natural; still he felt that he had an interest in the life he had tried to save that ought to have been acknowledged.

He longed for permission to wait and inquire the result of the remedies that had been so promptly directed; but no one appearing at the door, he very reluctantly turned away, with the intention of deferring his inquiries till a more convenient season.

He was in the act of rewarding the boatman who had carried him ashore, as well as another who had brought in his boat, when a respectable-looking man, unquestionably an upper servant, sprung rapidly down the stairs.

"If you please, sir," he said, almost out of breath, "my lady's compliments, and her ladyship hopes that you will do her the favour to step in and change your clothes."

The invitation appeared exceedingly welcome,

not so much because Arthur Calverley was beginning to feel uncomfortable in his sloppy garments, as from his experiencing a very strong disinclination to leave the place till he had learnt either the best or the worst of the adventure. So, after seeing his boat secured, he returned with the messenger.

The man was fluent with his lady's apologies for having neglected such strong claims upon her attention. He led the way into the house over a comfortably carpeted passage, into a pleasant chamber on the ground-floor, fitted up with antique presses and chests, with a large looking-glass in a quaintly carved ebony frame, standing on a table covered with a damask cloth trimmed with ancient lace, on which were the usual toilet-articles, of a very old pattern.

A steaming can of hot water had been placed conveniently near the washing-stand, and on a high-backed chair lay a pile of clothes and linen.

"My lady bade me say," added the man, "that she hoped you would have the goodness to excuse the dress her ladyship has had put out for

you, as it is the only change at her disposal—and when I tell you, sir, that it belonged to her ladyship's own deceased husband," he added confidentially, "and that she has never permitted any thing as was worn by his lordship to be touched by any body, domestics or even friends, you may flatter yourself, sir, on the high place you hold in my lady's estimation." Presently he took his departure, requesting that the bell should be rung whenever his services should be required.

Arthur lost no time in divesting himself of his wet clothes, and indulging in an ablution as hot as he could bear it; then had recourse to the change that had been provided for him with such evident consideration. It is impossible to express the surprise he felt as he gradually clad himself in the court-dress of some great state functionary, —the richly embroidered coat still retaining the star, apparently of some prized decoration, its possessor had been in the habit of wearing.

The clothes did not fit him very badly, and were far from uncomfortable after the soppy things

that had been, a few minutes before, clinging so coldly to his flesh; but as he regarded the reflection in the great swing-glass, Arthur could scarcely reconcile himself to the singularity of his appearance.

In some perplexity of mind, he rang the bell, which was immediately answered by the same domestic, bringing on a salver a steaming goblet of spiced negus.

"My lady begs that you will take this as hot as you can drink it, sir," he said. "Mrs. Jenkyns says that she has made it after her ladyship's own receipt, and with her humble service hopes it will do your honour good."

Arthur expressed his acknowledgments, and lost no time in imbibing the fragrant beverage, which he soon found had a most cordial effect. As he sipped it, he could not refrain from making inquiries after the object of his earnest solicitude.

"The doctor's with her, sir, and hasn't left her a moment," the man replied. "Indeed, no-

body has yet come from the room except my lady, sir, who looks very sad, and only came out to give some directions to Mrs. Jenkyns. But Mrs. Jenkyns says there's hope, and thinks we're all bound to you, sir, for trying to save our dear young mistress, whatever comes of it."

Arthur felt very desirous of knowing who their dear young mistress was—neither was he without a strong feeling of curiosity respecting the elder lady; but a sense of delicacy made him refrain from any direct inquiry.

"And now, sir," said the butler, when he saw that Arthur had emptied the silver cup, "I have to state that my lady will do herself the honour of receiving you in the drawing-room."

With a proper alacrity, Arthur Calverley followed his guide through the passages he had already traversed, and up a wide staircase, the bottom of which was supported by a pair of carved figures of negroes in yellow turbans, painted to resemble nature—and passing along a corridor, entered a handsome room decorated with tapestry-

covered chairs and couches, with a profusion of marqueterie furniture.

Presently the door was opened, and his name having been announced, Arthur Calverley entered an apartment furnished like the ante-room, with the addition of a series of Watteau subjects painted on the panels. Near one of the bay-windows that looked over the lawn he noticed the same venerable lady he had dimly seen in the porch. Her head-dress was piled up and elaborately decorated in a way that had been out of date nearly half a century, and of the same obsolete fashion was her swelling hoop and the laced stomacher of her substantial robe. She leant upon a stick with a china crook, raising herself from her chair as her visitor advanced. He immediately made a low bow, which elicited a stately curtsey. She then sunk back into her seat. A sweet but rather unsteady voice bade him be seated; and the possessor of it pointed to a couch near her. The youth bowed again, advanced to the place indicated, and accepted the proffered courtesy.

"I am happy to inform you that my dear grand-daughter is safe," she added, scrutinising his appearance, as he fancied, somewhat critically. "It was quite a providence that Dr. Cherriton happened to be in the house visiting me professionally when you appeared on the lawn, so that under his direction immediate measures could be taken for the dear child's restoration.

"The doctor assures me," she continued, striving to steady her tones, "that his patient requires only a day or two of perfect quiet for her complete recovery. It is impossible to express to you my sense of obligation for the important service you have rendered myself and my beloved grand-daughter. I am afraid you must have thought me strangely remiss at first; but I trust I shall be able to make ample amends for that apparent negligence."

Arthur was going to protest against any such intimation being required, but the stately old lady had more to say, and he did not dare to interrupt her.

"My dear lord has been dead many years," she said, with an abrupt change of subject for which her visitor was quite unprepared. "He received his appointment a little before the dear Prince of Wales came of age. This was in August; and in the same month of the following year the dear Duke of York had been born; in the same month, two years later, the dear Duke of Clarence; and in August, eight years after that, the dear Princess Amelia. I often said to the sweet Queen that it was very remarkable; and the sweet Queen acknowledged that it was very remarkable; but her gracious Majesty could not account for it. The dear good King could not account for it. Even my lord could not account for it."

"It was very remarkable indeed," replied Arthur.

"Poor dear, I thought all was over when I caught the first glimpse of her pitiable pale face," she began again in a tremulous voice. "She looked so like death, just as my lord looked when

I saw him for the last time," and a sob seemed to be struggling in her throat.

"But then, you know, the dear Duke of Kent was born in November; and so was the dear Princess Augusta; and so was the dear Princess Sophia. And that was very remarkable also, as the sweet Queen always allowed. And my lord said it was very remarkable; and so did the dear good King. But not one at court could account for it."

Her visitor ventured to express the truism that such extraordinary coincidences might puzzle the wisest heads.

"But when she opened her innocent eyes, and the death-like face began to appear more like her own pretty features, and when she recognised me and cried out "grand-mamma!"

Here a handkerchief was lifted with a trembling hand to eyes that were evidently suffused, and she stopped suddenly. Arthur could not have expressed a common-place, if his life had depended on it, and sympathy he did not dare attempt.

"The dear Duke of Sussex honoured the month of February with his birth; while the dear Duke of Cambridge preferred February; the dear Princess Mary, April; the dear Princess Royal, September; and the dear Duke of Cumberland, June: but not one of the thirteen royal children would have any thing to do with March, with July, or with October.

"When I pointed this out to the sweet Queen, her gracious Majesty did me the honour to agree with me that it was very remarkable, and the dear good King condescended to be of the same opinion, and my dear lord of course—for the Lord Chamberlain was too loyal to differ with his sovereign. And, in truth, all the household considered it very remarkable—particularly that four of the royal family should have been born in August, and three in November."

"I never knew a more remarkable circumstance," observed Arthur Calverley.

"Then it is impossible to express to you the state of my feelings;" the venerable lady resumed

again, with a pathetic tremble in her voice, "when the darling child began to make inquiries after her brother, and the good doctor was almost ready to shed tears at the thankfulness she expressed when she was told of his safety."

The handkerchief was again raised to the suffused eyelashes, under the spectacles, but very shortly withdrawn, and the clear pleasant look became brighter than ever.

"I remember the very first evening I enjoyed the happiness of going to Ranelagh, attended by my dear lord. As I took off my silk roquelaure and disclosed my gray tabbinet with the crimson stomacher, I met the sweet Queen and the dear good King, and we followed their Majesties into the rotunda. In the course of the concert the sweet Queen turned round to me, and said in a most gracious way, 'Lady Dorothy, I am charmed to see you looking so well.' 'Yes, Charlotte,' added the dear good King, glancing at me with the greatest condescension; 'Lady Dorothy looks wonderfully well. I offer my compliments to the

Lord Chamberlain on the happy occasion.' And my dear lord bowed and smiled, agreed with their Majesties that I had never looked better, and acknowledged himself to be the happiest of men.

"The sweet Queen was quite right—as her Majesty always was—and so was the dear good King. My lord was convinced that my gray tabbinet with the crimson stomacher became me immensely. In fact I am certain every body thought so who was at Ranelagh that night, for I assure you I was prodigiously admired."

Here the old lady produced from a concealed pocket an enamelled gold snuff-box, of an old French pattern, and opening it with evident satisfaction, helped herself to its pungent contents. She then perpetrated a succession of little sneezes that very much agitated the feathers and ribands in her prodigious head-dress.

"But the most touching scene of all," she added, again recurring to her emotional manner, "was when the darling child began to ask how

she had been rescued—for she was so eager to learn every particular, that the good doctor was obliged to tell her—and then her grateful expressions quite overpowered me."

The handkerchief was once more placed beneath the gold rims of the spectacles.

"The dear child would not be content when she heard that you were in the house," she continued hurriedly, "till I promised to see you, and let you know how sensible she is of the great service you had done her."

The little speech Arthur was about to make in reply was stopped by the sudden entrance of the physician.

"My lady Countess," said he, merely putting his head in at the door, "I have taken the liberty to intrude, to announce that your ladyship's granddaughter is convalescent, and that my Lord Fitzmaurice has been brought back by Mr. Dillon quite safe, having suffered no injury beyond the spoiling of his clothes.

"Thanks, doctor; a thousand thanks!" cried

only connexion with the present that she seemed to care to talk about.

There was something irresistibly kind in her hospitality, notwithstanding it characterised an age long gone by. The hostess pressed particular dishes on her guest, with the recommendation that they had been prepared under her superintendence; and directed a decanter to be handed to him with the announcement that it contained Malaga made from her own receipt.

He contrived to bear in mind that as he had been honoured with the temporary possession of the late Lord-Chamberlain's state costume, he was bound to conform to it as closely as he could; therefore his behaviour was very carefully made to assume the same formal yet courtly pattern.

The most trying portion of this assumption was when he ventured to take wine with the dowager. The solemnity infused into this act of social gallantry appeared perfectly successful. The blue eyes beamed with commendation through their crystal protectors, as the noble pile of feathers

and ribbons that surmounted her pleasant though rather antique face bent down in acknowledgment of the courtesy.

In due time the dessert was placed on the table, and they were left alone.

"It was a custom of my dear lord," observed the Countess, "which he never omitted, to drink the health of the royal family with the first glass of wine after dinner."

Immediately on this suggestion Arthur rose from his seat, and, striving to do justice to his embroidered coat, proposed the loyal toast. He had scarcely concluded when the door opened very quietly, and two young girls entered the room, first curtseying profoundly in the doorway.

Arthur had time to note that one was dark-eyed and dark-haired, with rather plump features and person. Her complexion, singularly rich, gave her face a peculiar charm of freshness that contrasted in a marked manner with the pallid features and extreme delicacy of her companion—her junior by at least a couple of years. Both

were dressed in white frocks, with broad pink sashes, and both wore their hair in a mass of clustering curls; but the golden tresses of the younger child were seen at a glance to lack the vigorous curl that characterised the purply-black locks of the other.

"Come here, my dears!" cried the dowager Countess.

At the word of command the two girls marched very upright and with a peculiar gravity of manner, and presently stood on each side of the old lady's chair.

"My grandchildren, Mr. Calverley," she observed.

He acknowledged the introduction with a gesture which he hoped would satisfy the demands of the occasion. His new acquaintances repeated their curtsey, neither, however, looking at the visitor.

"Have you finished your tambour-work, my dear?"

"Yes, if you please, grandmamma," replied the elder.

"Did you conquer that difficult passage in the Storm Rondo?"

"Yes, if you please, grandmamma."

Similar questions produced the same answer, expressed very sweetly, but exactly in the same quiet undemonstrative tone.

"The only child of my eldest daughter, who left her to my charge, in the fullest confidence that she would be as properly brought up as she herself had been."

The dowager glanced from the young lady to her guest as she said this little speech, with a look of tranquil satisfaction, as undisturbed by any regret in the past as any misgiving for the future.

"As the sweet Queen observed," she continued, "while doing me the honour to discuss the education of royal children, it is impossible to overrate the importance of bringing-up young people. The dear good King too always said it was the most important thing in the world; and my lord was completely of the same opinion."

"There cannot be two opinions on such a sub-

ject," Arthur replied; then ventured to add, "The appearance of your ladyship's youthful relatives is sufficient to satisfy any one how conscientiously you have fulfilled the duties coupled with so important a charge."

Neither of the young ladies took the slightest notice of the implied compliment or of the speaker. The student of the Storm Rondo was standing with her plump shoulders well forward, and her satin shoes in the most approved position, gazing at the ornamental work of the ceiling. The delicate one was far less stiff in her attitude; but her pallid face seemed impressed with a sense of languor, and her eyes were fixed upon the carpet.

"Do you feel better, my dear?" inquired the venerable lady, now turning to the younger of the two.

"Yes, if you please, grandmamma," replied a low but very sweet voice.

"Are you quite recovered, do you think?"

"Yes, if you please, grandmamma," was again the reply, almost in a whisper.

"The child of my nephew, Mr. Calverley," added his hostess, glancing benignantly through her bright glasses from the pale face to his own. "She and her brother have been left orphans; and but for your timely interposition, the heedlessness of one must have been fatal to the other."

It is impossible to express the earnestness with which Arthur gazed upon the face before him, trying in vain to recognise the sunny happy look that had attracted him a few brief hours before. The adventurous little voyager was timid almost to faintness. She did not lift her eyes from the ground; but a sudden quiver about the corners of her beautifully-shaped mouth, and a transient flush upon her delicate complexion, assured him of her gratitude.

"The dear child implored so earnestly to be permitted to see you," continued the old lady, "that I could not find it in my heart to refuse her, though she had been so naughty in going into the boat without my knowledge."

A shade of sorrow passed over the features of the interesting culprit.

"But we all know how impossible it is to put old heads upon young shoulders. I cannot say I have been always prudent myself. I remember when I was a girl and had been invited to my first ball by my aunt Lady Bab Dorincourt, after dancing with my dear lord till I was in a heat, in my white lutestring I left the ball-room and strolled into the garden with nothing round my neck but a coral *négligé*. I walked up and down the walks in the moonlight with my dear lord, and thought it very delightful; but the next day I was laid up with an attack of quinsey, which confined me to my room for a month; and my aunt Lady Bab Dorincourt said I had done a very wrong thing to go out in the moonlight after dancing a saraband, three cotillons, and four strathspeys, Money Musk, and Sir Roger de Coverley. During my illness I was conscious that I had done a very wrong thing, and was extremely sorry for my fault; as young people who have risked their precious

health by their thoughtlessness always ought to be."

The mild reproof was evidently very severe to the fair transgressor; for Arthur could see that she was struggling to suppress deep emotion.

"Here is a peach for you, my dears."

Each of the young ladies in turn took the gift presented to her, made a profound curtsey, and said, "Thank you, grandmamma," and then resumed her quiet attitude with the tempting fruit in her right hand, neither attempting to taste it.

Presently the dowager finished her glass of claret, which she had been sipping during intervals in the conversation, produced her enamelled snuff-box, and again gave her tall head-dress a violent shake with the sneeze that soon afterwards followed. After returning the box to her pocket, she rose. "I hope that you will excuse my leaving you so early," she said; "my ordinary hour of rest has arrived. The sweet Queen always liked me to keep good hours; and the dear good King was invariably particular on this very im-

portant point. His Majesty graciously considered it extremely important. My dear lord, too, insisted that nothing could be more important. I wish you good evening, Mr. Calverley, and trust that you will make yourself quite at home, and repeat your visit as soon and as often as it may be agreeable."

Arthur hurried to the amiable old lady's side, and assisted her to the door, expressing every thing that his sense of her goodness suggested. She held out her hand, and he bowed over it with as sincere a courtesy as if he had been a real lord chamberlain of the old court, making his respectful *adieux* to his royal mistress.

The two girls followed together step by step. As the elder passed Arthur, she momentarily glanced up to his face with some curiosity and more interest, curtseyed, and passed through the door he had kept open for her. The younger one also lifted up her eyes as she made the same graceful genuflection; but the look of grateful feeling they expressed was retained in his memory for many a

subsequent year, not entirely for its unspeakable tenderness. As she left the room with that touching look, a revelation came upon his mind that he could not resist, which filled him with wonder.

He had met that look before.

CHAPTER V.

A STRONG-MINDED WOMAN.

ALONG the high road that winds through the Delamere valley, here and there are to be found noblemen's and gentlemen's seats, and amongst them one or two mansions on a larger scale, with an imposing lodge and a magnificent avenue; but the one I am about to describe was approached merely by a circular carriage-drive, and was entirely screened by ornamental shrubs and trees planted before a sweep of lawn, in the centre of which stood a crumbling, weather-stained, moss-covered stone pillar that had once done duty as a sun-dial.

The house was a stone-built battlemented edifice, having a large frontage and a church-like door and windows; but of one story only. It had something of the aspect of a Dissenters' chapel in a district where architectural ambition had

not inspired the local carpenters or masons who call themselves builders; the little pointed-arched diamond-paned windows, and the dwarf battlements, being just such a demonstration of the gothic as might be expected from such experimental architects.

It had very much the prim look of a pasteboard model. Any one could see that it was not ancient; and though a connoisseur might hesitate in pronouncing it modern, from not wishing to throw discredit on the constructive talent of his contemporaries, it was well known to have been built by a brewer of wide celebrity, who having amassed a large fortune, chose to change his patronymic, that figured on every public-house in the county, for a name which had the advantage of sounding very genteel—indeed, was considered to be rather aristocratic.

So the house was built entirely after the retired brewer's taste, and became known as "Brabazon Lodge;" and Mr. and Miss Brabazon—the former a hale corpulent widower, the latter his

only child and heiress—came to live in it. Whether it was that playing the country gentleman did not agree with him, or his lungs missed the wholesome steam to which they had been so long accustomed, is not known. But the entire neighbourhood were well informed that within the first year of his coming amongst them, the apparently hale corpulent old gentleman had died suddenly of apoplexy.

Lucretia Brabazon inherited all his wealth, with his claims to notice as one of the landed gentry. She had been petted not only by her father, but by all around her; and the talent she really possessed, by injudicious flattery was made not only useless, but to a considerable extent mischievous. No expense had been spared on her education. All that the best masters could do, with great natural capacity, had been done; but self-will had been so fostered and encouraged, that when the young lady found herself sole mistress of a very large income, her independence of all control began to show itself in a style that the

rest of the world chose to regard with marked condemnation.

In dress, in opinion, in manners, she appeared totally different from all other females in a similar social position. She read books that no woman thought of looking into; she followed pursuits as uncongenial as possible to her sex; and chose associates that caused her to be shunned by every lady in the neighbourhood.

After scandalising the county by her vagaries, she took it into her head to travel, and was absent several years. Occasionally reports reached England of the most marvellous character respecting her. She had been met in the desert, living among the Bedouins, to all appearance as much an Arab as any of them. She had been seen scaling the heights of the Cordilleras, and winding over the pathless prairies of the South-American continent.

African explorers had found her in the dense jungle, at the head of a native party of hunters, pursuing the wild elephant and hippopotamus;

and adventurous tourists had come upon her by the boiling Geysers of Iceland, and the fearful crevasses of Mont Blanc. But wherever seen or heard of, under whatever circumstances of danger or difficulty, Lucretia Brabazon was sure to be quite at home.

Very wonderful after-dinner stories were told of her, from the Lord Lieutenant's castle to the most modest hunting-lodge within thirty miles of it; but when it became known that, after passing some time in the North-American states, she had returned to Brabazon Lodge, the most extraordinary excitement was created all over the county, which increased from day to day, as startling accounts were circulated of the sort of establishment its eccentric mistress had brought there, and the very strange doings that there went on.

No one, however, thought of calling; the ladies shuddered if the idea was presented to them; the gentlemen laughed and put on a knowing look. It was evident that the social ceremony of leaving a card was not to be thought of. Nevertheless,

scarcely a week was suffered to elapse after the young lady's arrival had become an established fact, when a visitor presented himself at her door. He was the Vicar of Little Delamere.

The house gave no sign of life, as the reverend gentleman approached the sham-antique door, and rang the bell; but at its summons he could hear voices and presently approaching footsteps. His surprise was great when the door opened; and instead of the customary man or maid-servant, he found himself confronted by a tall, sallow, sharp-featured, fierce-looking man, in a hunting suit of deer-skin, and a bowie-knife in his belt. He did not, however, betray any sign of astonishment; but as if the rencontre was a matter of course, pulled out his card-case, and gave a card into the man's hand, with a courteous expression of his desire to see Miss Brabazon.

"Oh, the parson, eh?" said the fellow, scrutinising the visitor from his new hat to his well-fitting French boots. "I guess you are a bit out o' your reckoning coming here. Unless Sambo

chooses to make tracks from Mumbo Jumbo, and inclines to go ahead towards conversion, I calculate there'll be no trade in your line. Mustapha's a Mussulman, and Mash-a-ca-boo as big a heathen as any of his tribe. As for me, I requires uncommon little religious fixings, I do. Whether I lives with the Injuns, the Mormons, the Shakers, or the Papist Missionaries, I accepts just what my neighbours has to give me, and shakes off all such notions when I has no more occasion for 'em."

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon smiled blandly, and intimated that he merely called to pay a neighbourly visit on his parishioner, having only last night been made acquainted with her return.

"Stranger, I was raised down east," replied the man, smoothing a black goatee that hung from his narrow chin, "and am pretty 'cute, I reckon. Ain't to be taken in with wooden nutmegs, no how—and if I has hired myself to a Britisher, it's because she can stump-up more dollars in a month than I could 'arn in the woods or prairies in a year. So, passon, I tells you, you ain't a goin'

to take me in, at any price. Howsomever, if Miss Brabazon chooses to have a deal wi' you, I calculate I can't have no lawful objection. So, step in and wait, while I go and tell her as you're here."

The Vicar entered a large hall, filled with the most extraordinary objects he had ever seen in his life. It was apparently a museum of natural history. An enormous serpent seemed about to spring upon him from one place—a huge bear threatened to hug him to death in another—here was a stuffed American eagle, there a grinning African baboon; while elephants' tusks, spears, war-clubs, bows and arrows, guns and pistols, were arranged as trophies among dried specimens of tropical plants, insects, and reptiles.

He had scarcely had time to notice these very singular decorations for a young lady's house, when the man who had left him returned.

"You be in luck, passon," he said, beckoning the visitor forward. "Make tracks arter me."

With his finger beside his nose, as they were

proceeding together towards the end of the hall, he added in a lower voice, "You can liquor-up when I calls at your shop. I arn't too proud to take a brandy cock-tail wi' a passon."

The Reverend Basil seemed affably to smile in acquiescence, as a door opened, and taking two or three steps forward, he found himself in a well-furnished parlour, in which, however, considerable confusion was apparent, by the appearance of objects not at all in harmony with the rest. There was a tiger-skin spread on a couch, and a buffalo's hide on the carpet; a rifle leaned against the corner nearest the fire-place, and a revolver stood upon the table.

On a rocking-chair, reclining with folded arms, in a nondescript costume, consisting of a silken tunic, and Turkish trousers of the same material, drawn in at the ankles, and smoking a cigarette, he beheld the figure and face of a woman about thirty. Her complexion, tanned by a foreign sun, her hair cut short like a man's, and the bold defiant expression of the face, might have caused

the reverend gentleman to doubt the sex of his parishioner, had he not been in some way prepared for her strange appearance.

He knew the person indolently moving up and down in the rocking-chair could be no other than Lucretia Brabazon, and bowed as he saw himself carefully looked over.

"You've come to see me, have you?" she demanded rather sharply. "A little more civil than the purse-proud aristocrats I have the misfortune to live amongst. At least I have now come to live amongst—for I'm a true citizen of the world. I couldn't consent to be tied by the heels to a stupid place, and surrounded by uninteresting people, when there were magnificent mountains to climb, the boundless Pampas to cross, interminable forests to penetrate, pathless wildernesses to explore, and stormy oceans to navigate."

"Yes; I have heard that you have been a great traveller, Miss Brabazon," said the Vicar, obeying a sign from his hostess to seat himself.

"Aha! rather a remarkable thing for a woman to be, I suppose you think? In the estimation of you, and such as you, a woman can only be a drudge or a toy."

"Pardon me, that has never been my opinion."

"What else is she in this country? A helpless creature, bound hand and foot in the chains of fashion and custom—each following the other, like a flock of silly sheep, in every observance of dress, however absurd or extravagant, and regarding any sister who neglects the puerile regulations they choose to style etiquette, as quite out of the pale of feminine sympathy."

The Rev. Basil Plynlymmon shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He did not feel himself at that moment called upon to be a champion of the sex. In the first place, he had no particular inclination for the office; in the next, it formed no part of his present programme to oppose the ideas of his eccentric parishioner. Still it would not do for him to be known as a disbeliever in feminine perfection. "You must allow," he

added, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "the admirable qualities of your sex as wives and mothers."

"Commonplace qualifications," retorted the lady disdainfully; "quite as general among the savage as among the civilised; indeed their absence would place women considerably below the brute creation, with whom fidelity to their mates and love of offspring are powerful instincts."

"It has been my privilege to know many estimable, many highly religious females," observed the reverend gentleman mildly.

"Who were very amiable among their particular friends, and went to church regularly," added his companion emphatically. "Very respectable examples, no doubt; but you don't know that the amiability was put on with the pretty bonnet, because it was considered becoming, and that church is as excellent a place for the display of new dresses and millinery as for any of the Christian virtues."

"Oh, you are too severe now, Miss Braba-

zon," exclaimed the Vicar, laughing though, as if rather amused at hearing such notions expressed.

"I detest women!" cried that young lady warmly, still rocking herself to and fro, and smoking without the slightest expression of excitement in her rather plain and somewhat masculine face. "I never allow them to be about me. In an emergency they are fit for nothing; in danger as helpless as babes."

The Vicar of Little Delamere had walked to Brabazon Lodge with the fullest determination not to be startled by any thing he might see or hear there; but to the idea of a lady living without domestics of her own sex he could not easily reconcile himself. He was half inclined to offer the services of his housekeeper.

"What could I do with a fine lady's-maid," she continued, "among the savages of equatorial Africa, or amid the virgin forests of the tropics? She would have been going into hysterics every five minutes. No; women are of no use in scenes of peril or difficulty; and Englishwomen are the

most helpless, stupid, indolent, good-for-nothing portion of the sex. I hate Englishwomen!"

The Vicar laughed at this declaration, but would not mention Mrs. Martha at present.

"You certainly seem to be very strongly prejudiced," he observed; "and probably stand alone in your opinions. But of course I must not quarrel with your preference for men."

"Who said I had any preference for men?" demanded Miss Brabazon, rather savagely. "Of two evils I choose the least. A man can be depended on to fire a rifle or a revolver, cut down a tree, navigate a vessel, and carry a burthen; at least I have learnt to rely upon Arabs, Hottentots, Indians, and other half-savage races that I have been forced to live amongst in the course of my rather extensive explorations. I select such fellows as I find I can depend upon, without distinction of creed, colour, or country, with one exception only,—nothing should induce me to have Englishmen about me; I detest Englishmen!"

The Vicar bowed with mock gravity, as if sen-

sible of the left-handed compliment to his nationality. He had been observing his fair parishioner with increased attention. He could not, after a careful study of her face, pronounce it handsome. The nose was neither Grecian nor Roman—indeed it was almost a pug—and the jaw was in a slight degree overhung, giving the mouth a prominence which rendered the features when quiescent somewhat vulgar in their expression; but the forehead was unquestionably fine, the eyes bright and clear, and the look when animated singularly fearless, as well as sincere.

The lady in the mean time had not been inattentive to her visitor. Since his introduction to the reader his personal appearance had undergone considerable improvement. The carelessness of person characteristic of the scholar had made way for studied neatness of dress. His straggling whiskers had disappeared, and a cleanly-shaved surface displayed a clear complexion to advantage. The plain eye-glass had been banished, and a double gold one was suspended from his neck.

His hair had evidently been dressed with affectionate solicitude. His clothes fitted without a wrinkle; his tie was immaculate; his gloves and his patent-leather boots did perfect justice to his well-formed hands and feet. As he had a fine set of teeth, his manner hearty and unaffected, and his age not more than that of his companion, it was not unlikely that he should make a favourable impression on a lady of any discernment—notwithstanding her alleged detestation of her countrymen.

"What could I have done with such creatures as Jeames or Mary-Jane in the heart of the Sahara, or climbing the terrible passes of the Andes?" she asked. "Unless pampered with the dainties they are accustomed to, they can't be got to stir a step. They would turn-up their noses at pemmican, and shudder at horse-flesh. In the wigwam or the kraal they would cry out for the conveniences of a town house; and when nothing can be got but buffalo-flesh and water, insist on mutton and beer.

"No, no, I required huntsmen and warriors; as capable to cook as to kill for the table; as ready to defend me against ferocious beasts as equally savage men: and when I met with one I could trust, I rarely found any difficulty in attaching him to my service."

"But now that you have returned to civilisation, Miss Brabazon?" inquired the reverend gentleman.

"I am not going to turn away those who have been faithful to me under many perils, Mr. Plynlymmon," replied his hostess determinedly. "They are used to me, and I am used to them. Besides, to tell you the truth, I do not appreciate your civilisation, I like to dress in accordance with my notions of comfort and ease. When I was threading the jungle, full of thorny cactus and spinous plants of all kinds, I should like to know where my drapery would have been if I had worn the ordinary foolish female dress? Do you think I could have lassoed, much less rode a horse fresh from the carral, on an awkward side-saddle? I

was too wise to do any thing so foolish. I wore pants and vest of deer-skin, and could cling to the bare back of a steed, however wild, as well as any girl on the prairies of South America or the steppes of Tartary."

The Vicar could not help experiencing a feeling of surprise, though he did his best not to betray it. The lady, however, went on rocking and smoking, and looking at him unconcernedly.

"The women of the East, whence your boasted civilisation arose," she continued, "refuse to encumber themselves with petticoats; and in the New World at least there are evidences of a desire to be rid of them. I found strong-minded females among our Transatlantic cousins who had determined to be independent of a slavish custom, and possessing a like mental strength, I readily followed their example."

"The dress is very pretty, unquestionably," observed the reverend gentleman, not disposed to find fault.

"But inconsistent with clerical ideas of female

decorum?" added the lady, in a tone of scornful interrogation.

The Vicar thought it far more appropriate at a masquerade than at church, but discreetly withheld his opinion.

"As if women of sense were to be bound to make their toilettes in strict conformity with male regulations!" said his fair parishioner. "But what can men know of such things, clergymen more especially? They had better reform their own absurd costume, their swallow-tailed coats and saucepan hats, for instance."

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"But I have forgotten the duties of hospitality," suddenly remarked his hostess; "you'll take some refreshment. Here, Captain!"

The shout instantly brought into the apartment the man who had admitted the visitor, who, after receiving certain directions, disappeared as quickly as he had entered.

"You must know," said the lady, confiden-

tially, "I picked up that gentleman in the neighbourhood of the Great Salt Lake, where he was living as a squatter, and was induced to engage him as guide and head of my establishment. After exploring with him a large portion of the American continent, I found no difficulty in persuading him to cross the Atlantic with me. Captain Hiram Whittler, I am quite aware, does not quite realise your idea of a lady's chamberlain."

The reverend gentleman laughed again. However *outré* looked his fair parishioner's domestic arrangements, he was determined not to question their propriety.

"Here we are, passon!" cried the individual thus introduced to him, bringing in a tray with glasses filled with some kind of beverage. "Here's a tipple that shall slip down your throat like buttered velvet."

The Vicar had placed before him a tumbler filled with alternate layers of sugar, ice, and wine, and a straw was put into his hand; but this enticing suction being totally new to him, he wisely

delayed its enjoyment till he had seen the *modus operandi*.

He had not long to wait. Miss Brabazon flung the end of her cigarette into the grate, and helping herself to the nearest tumbler, put the straw tube into her mouth, and, inserting the other end into the beverage, drew up a portion of the contents. Her visitor quietly followed her example, and seemed particularly gratified with the result.

"You never liquored so pleasantly afore, did you now, passon?" inquired the Yankee captain. "It warn't to be expected in such a used-up country as yourn. But if you wants to right-down enjiey it, you should first have a good stand-up fight with a bar or a painter in the Rocky Mountains."

The Vicar thought he could appreciate the beverage without the company of the bear or the panther, or the necessity of travelling out of the safe and more accessible area of his own parish.

There was a third tumbler, which, somewhat to the visitor's astonishment, the Captain seized upon, sat himself down, and began to suck at like a fish. At intervals he addressed himself to his male companion in a tone of easy, almost patronising familiarity, asking questions with an amount of curiosity that seemed to increase with every answer.

The reverend gentleman's patience was very much tried, the more so when he noticed that Miss Brabazon had lighted another cigarette and had resumed her rocking, with a mischievous expression in her eyes that assured him she was enjoying the trial.

"Well, stranger," exclaimed the man with rough heartiness, "I guess as you're by no means a bad sort o' chap for a passon. Spose you goes ahead out o' this worn-out country and makes tracts for some o' the new states o' Uncle Sam's territory —California, Texas, or Mexico, if you has a mind; for it won't be long afore the latter will find a corner in the star-spangled banner. I calculate

then you may settle down comfortably among the red-skins or the whites, whichever on 'em you thinks wants most religion; and if ye arn't scalped by the one, or gouged by the other, I haven't the least manner o' doubt you'll get on with 'em first-rate.

"Say it's a deal, passon!" added Captain Whittler, giving the clergyman a slap on the back that nearly knocked him out of his seat.

"Not at present, thank you, Captain," he replied mildly, drawing his chair further away; "I've got duties to perform here that I cannot neglect."

"Dooties!" cried the other, starting up hastily; "that reminds me of our tarnation nigger! Have Sambo made them beds, I wonder, or washed them taters, or put them pork-fixings on to bile? I 'spect he ain't, 'cause he went down to the river to bathe, and nobody have set eyes on him since. I guess he'll get a cow-hiding if he ain't a considerable deal smarter. So I'll just look him up, passon."

"Is that your maid, Miss Brabazon?" inquired the Vicar with affected seriousness, after the man had closed the door behind him.

"No, the Captain is my housekeeper," was the reply.

"Then Sambo, I suppose, officiates in the more confidential capacity?"

"No; he is a bushman I picked up at the Cape, and acts as a kind of general drudge."

"O, I understand."

He felt a strong desire to inquire into the composition of the remainder of this strange establishment; but fancied that the look of its mistress did not favour the investigation.

"Now, Mr. Plynlymmon," she demanded, "just tell me, without any circumlocution, what brought me the honour of your visit? It's not of the least use, you know, saying that you feel an interest for me as one of your flock. I don't consider myself one of any flock. If I'm to be regarded as a sheep, the rest of the fold might take, I'm afraid, a reasonable objection to my colour.

The truth is, as regards religion, I had better at once say I'm nothing in particular. A learned Rabbi, who taught me Hebrew in Jerusalem, threw cold water on my desire to be a Jewess. In Judea I could not help feeling the influence of every place I visited. The Israelites, too, are a fine old race, and their faith indisputably genuine. I don't wonder at any one having an inclination for a change, going to the fountain-head."

The Vicar opened his eyes at the would-be Jewess, very wide indeed, but judiciously said nothing.

"Then again, when I was at Rome," she resumed, "I tried to act as the Romans do; but though unlimited priestly assistance was offered, I found I could not *think* as they did. I ascertained that some of my countrymen and countrywomen, who had entered the Eternal City about the same time, perhaps quite as good Protestants as the Archbishop of Canterbury, had left it more popish than the Pope himself. But, somehow or other, my imagination refused to be affected by grand

decorations and imposing spectacles, music, pictures, or flowers. I acknowledged the great Roman pageants to be got up in a style that would have enriched the treasury of any theatre; but I took my leave of the Holy Father without the slightest intention of worshipping that amiable old gentleman as God's representative upon earth."

The Vicar smiled approvingly.

"I never fancied Mahomedanism. Even when I was at Stamboul, and enjoyed the society of the most learned Turks, I felt no inclination to adopt the Koran. The doubtful position in which the daughters of Islam are placed, in earth as well as in Paradise, may have had some influence upon me. Be this as it may, I regarded the Prophet with as much indifference as the Pope."

The Vicar applied himself to the mint-julep, and was evidently in quite a delightful frame of mind.

"I did not trouble myself much about such considerations, till I found myself in the metropolis of the Mormons. Now, though I could not

help looking at Joe Smith and Mahomet as birds of a feather—the American borrowing his plumage from the Arabian eagle—I could as little avoid reviewing the substantial advantages of such a religion, when I was invited to be "sealed" to the head of the church. Happily for myself, I discovered that the Prophet had already twenty wives; so I declined the proffered honour, with, I hope, a proper humility; and shortly after left the city of the Salt Lake, less a Latter-day Saint than any thing."

The Vicar laughed outright.

"Since then I cannot say that my religious views have been very decided. For a time I paid some attention to the worship of the Parsees, as I thought the fame of Zoroaster made it worthy of careful study. Then I listened to the Brahmins, and tried to get-up an interest in Hindoo pantheism. Lastly I took a turn at Confucius, and strove to master the mysteries of Buddha. I found a heap of puerilities, more childish than the extravagances of Western heathenism, and

gladly turned my back upon the various phases of Oriental superstition.

"If I took up with any thing in that way, I should prefer the classical type. There must have been something in the Olympian Pantheon, or it could not have had so long and firm a hold on the intelligence of Greece and Rome. For my part, I cannot help saying, that if any one were bold enough to return to the faith of our classical fathers, I would join him in getting up an appropriate temple. What do you think now, Mr. Plynlymmon? Suppose I were to offer you the post of high-priest of Jupiter?"

The countenance of the Vicar of Delamere Parva had been growing more grave; but at the question addressed to him it became very serious indeed; the expression, however, lasted only a moment.

"Suppose I wait, Miss Brabazon, till a fitting temple is erected," he said, "and there are sufficient worshippers to fill it. In the mean time I hope that you will kindly assist me in the arduous

duties I have to perform as a minister of a Christian congregation."

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady, with any thing but an encouraging expression, "you want a subscription. What is it for?"

The reverend gentleman did not seem prepared for this straightforward way of coming to the point. He began to dilate on the enormous expenses he had incurred in providing for the spiritual wants of the parish, and dwelt very movingly on its present very pressing necessities.

Miss Brabazon heard him out without interruption. "I think you can do very well without bells," she said; "a key and a frying-pan may be necessary to hive a swarm of bees; but there can be no occasion to knock two pieces of metal together to induce people to assemble at a certain time in a certain building, when they can readily refer to clocks or watches for the recognised hour of meeting. I am afraid that you are not doing much good by your system of education. When you assure me that the prisons are empty, I will

assist you to enlarge your schools. As for the projected infirmary, I have always understood that there was a parish doctor; and, unless an epidemic should break out, I see no use for another."

The Vicar felt disconcerted at this rebuff; still he did not betray his feelings. Indeed, he was far from disheartened, and would not yet abandon all hope of placing Miss Brabazon among his liberal patronesses. He rose as smilingly from his seat as if his errand had been successfully accomplished, and, while putting on his gloves, looked attentively on the portrait of a snub-nosed gentleman, in a handsome frame, that hung on the wall.

"Very like Mr. Pitt—very like him indeed. I congratulate you on possessing so fine a portrait of that eminent statesman."

Miss Brabazon did not reply; but she stopped her rocking, and took the cigar from her mouth. The individual represented on the canvass was the once-popular brewer. His daughter seemed pleased.

"There is another portrait of Mr. Pitt in the picture-gallery of Porchester Castle," he added; "but I do not think it is so good as this. I called there this morning to wait on the duchess, who, though a sad invalid, ordered me to be admitted directly. I told her grace I was going to call upon you, after, with her usual liberality, she had contributed to my charities. The excellent duchess acknowledged that she had heard a good deal about you, and should certainly leave a card at Brabazon Lodge as soon as her health would permit her to drive out."

Miss Brabazon, though essentially a strong-minded woman, had one weakness;—to be noticed by people of rank was peculiarly agreeable, perhaps because apparently unattainable. In truth it was quite a new pleasure to hear of a duchess talking about calling upon her; for she was well aware that the ladies of the neighbourhood had done their best to ignore her existence.

"The duchess is very amiable, I have heard," she observed in a much less confident voice.

"Her grace does an immense deal of good," replied the Vicar. "She has assisted in all my benevolent projects; moreover, has obtained for me the valuable assistance of the duke, and of the distinguished people in the county. She will be disappointed, I am afraid, at not finding your name in my list of supporters; for on parting with me she said, 'Miss Brabazon is reputed to be prodigiously eccentric; but she may have a very good heart for all that; I am sure that she will help you in your good work.'"

Miss Brabazon sprung from her chair, and was at the side of the speaker before he had buttoned his glove, a process he had taken a long time in endeavouring to accomplish.

"Put my name down for whatever sum the duchess subscribes," she said hurriedly.

The Vicar turned round with a smile of secret satisfaction at the recompense his patience and tact had extracted, and was about to take the offered hand of his hostess, when suddenly a tremendous outcry, apparently in front of the house, startled

them both. Presently a short thick half-clad negro dashed by the window at the top of his speed, yelling with all his might. A minute later he was followed by a pack of fox-hounds, tearing after him in full cry.

Scarcely had they passed when Miss Brabazon, eagerly snatching up the revolver off the table, rushed out of the room, leaving her visitor transfixed as it were to the spot, bewildered with amazement. A horrible tumult, made up of the most unearthly noises, drew him to the window, and he then gazed upon a scene that made every nerve in his body thrill with terror.

Two huntsmen in red coats were shouting at and whipping off the dogs, while their horses were scarcely manageable for fright. A few yards off stood Miss Brabazon, holding back by a chain a puma, whose roar and attempts to get free were making an immense impression on all before him. Immediately in the rear of the lady came Captain Hiram Whittler with a rifle; a Bedouin, in turban and burnouse, followed, carrying a long tufted

spear at the charge; a North-American Indian, flourishing a tomahawk, came next; and at his heels a Bushman, with a short elephant-gun; all the men shouting and screaming in different languages, in the most frantic state of excitement.

"Skedaddle!" shouted the Yankee. "If that ar' painter gets loose, you and your dogs and osses will be chumped up like quashes in a hog-yard."

But Dick Wilcox and Will Tupper plied their heavy whips with so clear an appreciation of the danger, that despite of the rearing of their steeds, it was evident that the entire pack would soon be clear of the premises.

"Off with you!" cried Miss Brabazon, pulling with all her might at the chain with both hands. "The next time you come frightening my servants I will let this beast free."

The red-coats did not attempt an explanation, though it would have proved them entirely blameless. The pack was in the opposite meadow, when Sambo caught sight of them approaching, and injudiciously took to his heels; they crossed the

water, took up the scent, and pursued their novel game with an ardour that must very soon have produced a fatal result, had not the latter, by tremendous exertions, succeeded in finding shelter.

The two whippers-in spurred on to prevent the horrible catastrophe that seemed imminent, and arrived just in time to make an effort to save the hounds, now threatened with destruction in their turn.

Sambo and his friends continued to advance, shouting and screaming their indignation and desire of vengeance in their several tongues; the puma growled, the horses started, and the hounds yelped and barked as they disappeared into the shrubbery. In a few minutes the gates were closed against the intruders, and the other party returned triumphant to that part of the house whence they had emerged.

The sight of that savage-looking animal had rather alarmed the Vicar. He did not at all like remaining in a dwelling which contained such an inmate; nor did the appearance of the members of

this strange household reconcile him to such an associate. The puma might escape. As this idea presented itself, the visitor put on his hat, and opened the door cautiously. As all seemed quiet in the hall, he thought it quite unnecessary to wait to take leave of his hostess; so sped on tiptoe to the outer door. After peeping out with the same caution, he closed it softly behind him, and hastened along the gravel drive.

The reverend gentleman began to breathe more comfortably when he found himself clear of Brabazon Lodge. He hurried along the road in the direction of the Vicarage, marvelling greatly at what he had seen and heard during this memorable visit.

As he became assured of his personal safety, his ideas grew calmer, and he began to speculate hopefully on his future relations with his very, very strange parishioner. He did not forget the promised liberal subscription; indeed, it had made a strong and agreeable impression on his mind. She was evidently little better than a heathen; but

he did not despair of making her accessible to good counsel. Notwithstanding her repulsive *ménage*, he must somehow or other find means to cultivate her acquaintance.

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon did very industriously cultivate the acquaintance of Miss Brabazon—with what result the reader will learn.

CHAPTER VI.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

A VERY pretty picture might have been found in the charming little bower, then covered with flowering clematis and honeysuckle, that stood screened from the river-view by a clump of laurels, on the east side of Rose Lawn; and from within it could be seen very pleasant glimpses of the green verandahed cottage, with its myrtles, geraniums, and standard-roses arranged in ornamental vases before it, as well as a bright stretch of the Thames, with its ever-varying picturesque accessories.

Two girls were reclining in the cool shelter of that leafy arbour. The elder, well grown, almost womanly, with a rich dark complexion, and shining black hair carefully curved over her temples, and lustrous eyes shaded by long black lashes,

rested her feet against one end of the rustic bench, while her back was supported by the other.

Before her sat, on a low stool, a more delicate figure, with fair complexion, tender hazel eyes, and a profusion of soft rich curls flowing down to her ivory shoulders. She was gazing attentively, with a look full of girlish interest, upturned to the animated face of her companion, who, though she had a bound volume of *Childe Harold* in one hand, had allowed it to drop half-closed into her lap, while engaged in some communication apparently of a peculiarly confidential character.

Both were dressed in light summer morning-frocks, their straw-hats laid aside with their parasols, and their hands ungloved, as if resting after a walk or ride. But if they were tired, such was not the case with their several pets,—a fox-hound pup and an Italian greyhound, that continued to bound in and out of the arbour, racing down the gravel-walk, and tumbling over each other against the box-borders, as if they never could grow weary of such sport.

The air was rich with the odour of lavender, musk, mignonette, and heliotrope, clumps of which bloomed close at hand; no small addition to the perfume being contributed by the myriad blossoms on the bower, that helped to screen its inmates from the sun. They were, of course, the young ladies of the Chiswick villa, introduced in a former chapter: the elder had been staying a week with her father; and her cousin, holding her disengaged hand, was listening to a confidential account of her visit.

"Then he would take me into the new kennel he had built," said the former; "and I was introduced in form to forty couple of the finest hounds in the kingdom. There was Towzer, and Challenge, and Jowler, and Ringwood, and Teaser, and Sweetlips, and Rose, and a great many more I cannot remember; and the leaping and barking by which they expressed their delight in making my acquaintance, was something wonderful. Really, the first and second whip, Dick Wilcox and Will Tupper, and the huntsman Rogers, had enough to

do to keep them off. Dear papa was in ecstasies; he declared that they knew I was a fox-hunter's daughter. The men assured me that this was the case, with such earnestness, that I was obliged to believe them. And so I continued to throw biscuits and pat their noble heads, till I was hurried off to the stable."

"Taking a fancy to the pup you brought with you?" added the other.

"No, dear; that was old Dawkins's present, as I came away. He could think of nothing more appropriate for his master's daughter, as a remembrance; so he presented 'Bob,' as he called him, with a set speech, as I was stepping into the carriage. Dear papa laughed as usual; said that Bob must be the envy of the whole pack; and so of course I brought him."

"Gently there!" she cried sharply to the young hound, as the delicate little greyhound was rolled over on the grass by her stronger companion. "I am afraid you are too rough a playfellow for dear little Fidele! Come here, sir."

The dog stopped his play, looked towards his mistress, and then bounded to her side.

"I then went to see the foals, and the colts and fillies in training," continued the speaker with increased animation. "Oh, such pretty yearlings! such loves of two-year olds! You would have been charmed with their sleek coats and their graceful limbs, their bright intelligent eyes and their spirited lively movements!"

"I know nothing about horses, darling," observed her companion quietly; "but I have no doubt that I should be pleased with whatever pleased you."

A gentle pressure of the hand and an affectionate look acknowledged this cousinly speech.

"Dear papa would insist on my choosing for myself," resumed the other. "Nothing would content him but my going into the paddock and inspecting all his young stock. It was famous fun to see him making the boys show the paces of the thoroughbreds, he pretending to be a horse-dealer and I a purchaser, asking a hatful of

money for each in turn; and then in his emphatic way swearing that he should lose by the bargain; Musters the trainer gravely backing every thing he said; and the grooms and jockeys grinning their knowing heads off, as they brought their horses forward."

"Your papa must have been very happy, darling."

"Of course he was. He was happier still when I selected the most promising two-year old in the lot—a bright bay named 'Firefly,' for which he had refused a top price, and had backed him heavily to run against a chestnut filly of Lord Vernon's, called 'Camilla,' that had won a race a few weeks before. Dawkins solemnly said there could be no mistake as to whose daughter I was; and all the young monkeys of boys looked at me with a wondering admiration that was more amusing than their previous vain attempts to maintain their gravity.

"Well, nothing would satisfy papa but having a side-saddle put upon 'Firefly;' and as I had on

my new blue habit I was easily prevailed into accepting him as a mount. Another horse having been brought for papa, he proposed that we should proceed to the Downs. Nothing loth, I rode with him up from the valley on to the race-course, where, to my extreme surprise, I found the Duke of Porchester, Lord Vernon, Sir Harry Chester, Tom Holyoake, and all that set. Then it came out that papa had actually made a match that I should ride 'Firefly,' while Lord Vernon rode 'Camilla;' and that the race was to come off then and there."

"*You* ride a race! Oh, Fanny."

"I was a little taken aback at first; but when I learned how large a sum papa had betted, and heard the Duke offer five to four that I should win, I became as excited as any of them, and eagerly rode into the enclosure to take my place at the starting-post.

"When the word was given, off we went, the chestnut taking the lead. I managed to hang pretty close on her flanks, so that she was never

much more than a length ahead. In this state we turned the corner, and commenced the return mile. The filly still showed in front; when I could hear shouts of encouragement as I came within half a mile of the judge's stand, where our friends had clustered, and could see papa waving his hat, the most conspicuous of them all.

"I was aware that the colt was gaining ground —so apparently was he. At a quarter of a mile there was not more than half a length between me and Lord Vernon, who was using the whip. I put mine between my teeth, leant forward, patted Firefly on the neck, and urged him on with my voice. He made a rush, the Duke and papa cheered lustily as they waved their hats, and I shot by the winning-post, beating Lord Vernon by a neck."

"Wasn't your papa glad?"

"They were all glad; indeed, one would have thought they were all mad, there was such a wild scene of rejoicing and congratulation immediately I was declared the winner. As for dear papa, he

was quite beside himself with pride and joy as he rode up to me, when I turned round, and kissed me with tears in his eyes. Then they gave me three cheers, and there was a general shaking of hands. The Duke said a hundred civil things; so, in fact, did every body; and when papa acknowledged that I was the owner of Firefly, with all his engagements, there was a general production of betting-books, and odds were offered in his favour, as if each was more eager than the rest to stake his money."

"How pleased you must have been, darling!"

"But the best of the fun happened when I returned home, and papa made a speech to the men, telling them how I had won the race. Those mischievous monkeys of boys came with eyes staring out of their knowing little faces; and there was such huzzaing amongst them all, as made the horses quite skittish."

"Did you lose your heart to any of the gentlemen?"

"Can't say I did. They were all very complimentary, particularly my opponent. His lordship seemed as if he could not say enough in my praise; Sir Harry squeezed my hand; Tom Holyoake affected the tender swain; the Duke gallantly swore that Diana wasn't fit to hold a candle to me; and Lord Vernon persisted in keeping on one side my horse, my father being on the other, and making eyes at me in the most ridiculous manner possible."

"O Fanny!"

"They were all very well, child," she added, more slowly, as she looked intently at her companion; "but you would have been the first to acknowledge that there was not one of them to be compared with *a certain person.*"

The fair face of the younger girl suddenly flushed crimson at hearing the last words emphasised.

"Oh, you tell-tale!" cried the other, laughing archly. "No young lady ought to confess a preference so readily. *I* wouldn't do so, on any account."

"Darling Fanny! One must feel a regard for one's preserver, you know."

"That depends. Suppose, instead of a handsome youth, he had been a very plain sort of common-place, middle-aged man, you wouldn't insist on falling desperately in love with him, would you, child?"

"Perhaps not, dear."

"If he had a pug-nose or a squint, or a humped back, for instance, you wouldn't blush so prettily the very moment he was referred to."

"Did I blush, dear?"

The words were uttered in an exquisitely soft and tender voice.

"Did I blush, dear?"

The elder cousin imitated them exactly; then, catching the still rosy face in her hands, stooped her head and kissed it tenderly.

"It doesn't matter, darling," she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her companion's neck. "You know I'm a model of prudence."

Geraldine made no reply; the bright head

nestled on the breast of her cousin, the dove-like eyes glancing up appealingly, suffused with a consciousness of happiness that would have melted a much harder heart than the loving impulsive one her own was beating against so rapidly.

"It isn't wrong, dear, is it?" she murmured. "Of course he cares nothing for me, for I'm a child, and perhaps I shall never see him again, as he is so many thousand miles away, fighting those dreadful people in India; but I cannot help being grateful. It was so very kind of him to risk his own life to save mine."

"Very kind and gallant, dear, unquestionably. I was at the window watching you and Fitz, and saw the promptitude and boldness with which he plunged after you, while so many stupid people were content with hallooing and screeching; and presently brought your poor dripping figure to the surface, looking so dreadfully like a corpse, I screamed with fright."

Geraldine shuddered, closed her long lashes, and hid her bright face on her friend's shoulder.

"But, then, after that fearful tragedy came a comedy, the like of which I shall never see again in this world. Grandmamma and your gallant in that fine suit she allowed him to wear, looking and acting so prodigious courteous to each other, while we poor little simpletons were allowed to stand still and wonder. Wasn't it very droll?"

The silken lashes opened, and the soft hazel eyes flashed out with a light that illumined the fair girlish face with inexpressible brightness.

"But was he not handsome, dear?" she demanded in a whisper.

"To be sure he was. Now, Bob!" cried the elder lady sharply, as the Italian greyhound was knocked over in a manner that seemed to have sent the breath out of her delicate body. "It's well for you I haven't got my riding-whip. Come here, directly!"

This diversion completely roused Geraldine, for she sat up, with one arm thrown round her cousin's waist.

"I forgot to tell you," said the latter, "that

when I found papa in so good a humour, I made him promise that grandmamma and you should come and stay with me for two or three weeks; and I ordered a new pony-carriage that I may drive you about; and Musters is to have one of the best-tempered colts broken-in expressly for you, for I mean to make you such a perfect horse-woman, that when a certain person returns—"

A closer embrace stopped the sentence abruptly, and the fair complexion was brighter than ever.

"What a darling kind thoughtful mamma you are, Fanny," exclaimed the sensitive girl, as she shook back her silken curls, and gazed earnestly into the face of her cousin. "And your papa, too, how very good of him to invite us."

"I will tell you something that shall please you more, my pet," said the other as fondly. "My papa knows a certain person; and when I told him how great an obligation he had laid us all under, he burst out in his praise in language

a little too strong for his daughter to repeat, dear. Then he said he had heard from one of the family that he had greatly distinguished himself in the last campaign, had been promoted, and was looked upon as an officer of great promise. Think of that, dear."

It was evident that she did think of it. The soft brown eyes flashed with intense pleasure; and the smile that played round the pouting red lips gleamed like sunlight on a tropical fruit. Suddenly a shadow of sadness passed over the glowing face.

"But suppose those horrid Sikhs—" she shuddered, and seemed unable to express the unwelcome suggestion.

"'Fortune favours the bold,' my pet," replied the other, encouragingly. "We know how fearless he is; and such gallant knights invariably go through all kinds of danger, and become distinguished generals, like Clive and Wellington and Napier."

"Ah!" cried Geraldine, with evident despondence; "if he should become very great, I

cannot expect him to remember the little girl whose life he saved—and—"

"Who loves him so dearly," added her friend; "and who is striving with all her dear little heart and soul to be worthy of his affection when he returns to England. I know it all, dear; all your strenuous efforts to get on in your studies, all your anxiety to excel in accomplishments. Your every thought, every hope, is to become attractive in his eyes at your next meeting."

"Dear Fanny!" exclaimed the ingenuous girl, as the tell-tale face was again hid on her shoulder.

"Well, darling, there is nothing to be ashamed of," added her confidante. "I only hope that he may appreciate you as you deserve, for you certainly are the most amiable, most loveable, kindest, best little pet of a cousin that ever existed."

Here a sudden squeak from the roughly-used Fidele, as she went rolling over the grass, caused another diversion, for both girls started up suddenly, and the elder rushed towards the offender,

apparently to inflict some punishment. He thought it prudent to beat a hasty retreat. Eventually, however, he permitted himself to be enticed to his former post, near his mistress, and, having received a scolding, with drooping stern and other signs of canine penitence, turned himself round and round till he found a resting-place to his liking.

The fair gossips now sat side by side on the seat.

"But I haven't told you half the pleasure I mean to afford you when you come to spend your holidays with me," resumed the elder. "There's a new boat on the lake, on which I mean to row you about."

Geraldine looked as if the idea suggested feelings of pain rather than of pleasure.

"But there's no fear of an immersion there, child," said the other. "There will be no thoughtless boy to get you upset by his awkwardness."

"Poor Fitz!" exclaimed his sister; "I wonder if he has joined his regiment."

"Or, in more honest language, you wonder if he has joined his brother officer. Isn't that it, you sly puss? Well, well, I won't tease. We know that he reached Calcutta quite safe and well, and that he had started to join the army. Lucretia Brabazon told me that she had received a letter from her cousin by the last mail, which informed her of your brother's arrival in India. By the way, I shall introduce you to Miss Brabazon. She is a great friend of mine, you must know, though she is rather a strange creature. Oh, there are lots of people I intend you to become acquainted with. There's the Rev. Basil Plynlymmon, who is building a new church. He is a very popular clergyman, and, as a further recommendation to you, I will let you know the important fact that he was tutor to *a certain person.*"

"Fanny!" cried the younger girl, with a look of mingled pleasure and curiosity.

"As soon as I became aware of this, I thought it my cousinly duty to make inquiries as to his

pupil's antecedents. Of course, I expected to hear all kinds of peccadilloes, but judge of my disappointment, when I heard the good man declare that the young gentleman was a model of steadiness and propriety."

The young face again brightened up with smiles and glances of intense gratification.

"It would have been so pleasant, you know, to one's naturally malicious feelings to have been able to report that he was a shocking bad character that you must have nothing to do with. Wouldn't it dear?"

By way of reply, Geraldine threw her arms round her friend's neck, and kissed her.

"But I may have an opportunity of being spiteful yet," the other added, "for I ascertained that the worthy man had lately received a handsome present from his former pupil. So, of course he has been bribed, and the model youth may have been quite a horrible wretch, my dear."

"O Fanny! how can you say so?"

"But who is this coming?"

The two girls sat up in an attitude that would have satisfied the most rigid stickler for feminine decorum of deportment. One seized her hat, the other gravely examined her parasol; both waited while the footsteps advanced. It was only the parlour-maid, a neat demure little damsel, in a brown stuff dress, set off by a small white apron. Her hair seemed to be cut close, for nothing was seen of it under the round cap with very unpretending ribbons she wore on her head.

"A letter, if you please."

Both girls started at the very mild announcement; the younger, however, being the nearest, stretched out her hand, as if by an uncontrollable impulse. As soon as she caught sight of the superscription, she bounded up from her seat, her face glowing with animation, and waving the letter round her tresses, began dancing about in the wildest state of excitement. The bearer, with a look showing that she understood the case perfectly, withdrew.

"What in the world are you about, Geraldine?" demanded her cousin.

"A letter from Fitz! A letter from Fitz!"

She repeated the joyful intelligence over and over again, still waving the welcome missive triumphantly round her head, as she continued to bound in front of the arbour; in which exercise she was presently joined by the two pets, who barked in joyful chorus to her exclamations of pleasure.

"You are all mad together, I think," cried her companion. "Do come and sit down and read your note, like a sensible girl. Who knows but what it may contain important intelligence respecting a certain person?"

The suggestion brought the young lady instanter to seat herself on the bench beside her senior; but she was evidently in a flutter of expectation and excitement. For a minute or so the two girls silently examined the writing, the post-mark, and the seal; then it was carefully opened, the pages deliberately smoothed, and after adjusting their

flounces and sitting very close together, with faces becoming every moment more earnest and more grave, they addressed themselves to its perusal.

"*You* read it, dear!" said Geraldine, passing it to her cousin.

The other, apparently guessing the cause of the transfer, with increased gravity of manner prepared to fulfil the duty imposed on her; her young kinswoman, with a fluttering heart and an anxious face, leaning on her shoulder and fixing her eyes upon the paper.

"Head-Quarters of the Army, Camp ——, 18—."

The girls looked at each other with painful solemnity. The reader proceeded.

"*Dear little Kittens!*"

"Now that's too bad of Fitz!" cried the elder of the two, apparently with offended dignity. "It's well for him that he's not present, or I'd kitten him with a vengeance. He ought to have known better."

"He's only a boy, dear," said the other,

coaxingly, "and he doesn't mean the least harm in the world. *Do* go on, there's a darling."

"He ought to know that when a young lady's seventeen last birthday, she has a right to a more appropriate appellation than that of a juvenile cat."

"Fitz I am sure will be very sorry when he learns that he has vexed you."

"Oh, I'm not vexed at all."

"There's a dear—and skip that—what does he say next?"

The offended young lady threw her head up, and, with a lofty look, smoothed the sheet on her lap, and proceeded to resume her reading.

"*Dear little Kittens!*"

"You see I can bear it," she added, turning her handsome face to her companion; "I can treat the indignity with that majestic indifference which becomes a woman of my age and experience."

"Darling Fanny, do go on."

Thus adjured, the fair reader, without further remark, read as follows:

"Here we are at last, in sight of the enemy, after a precious long journey in search of them. But it was uncommon jolly, all of it, and we intend walking into them like one o'clock. My regiment has been ordered to the front, and have had more than one brush with mounted Sikhs that cluster in our line of march in great force, and come sweeping down upon us with a tremendous bobbery, as if about to make mincemeat of us all; but presently they are seen riding helter-skelter away, half of their horses with empty saddles, our men in hot pursuit, cutting them down in grand style. Oh, it's the jolliest fun!"

The two girls looked into each other's faces, with aspects expressive of extreme astonishment, as if they found some difficulty in realising the idea of their former playfellow taking delight in scenes of such evident danger. The reading was resumed.

"I've made lots of new friends. First, there's Jones of ours, and a deuced entertaining chap he is; he has such lots of stories about tiger-hunting

on elephants, and pig-sticking with spears, and racing after jackals; and beautiful Ranees ready to fall in love with a fellow; and the most ravishing dancing-girls ever seen out of the Arabian Nights."

"Not a proper companion for Fitz, I'm sure," said the reader gravely.

"I should not think he was, dear. But go on, please."

"Then there's Major Rafferty, who drinks oceans of brandy-pawnee and eats curry by the cart-load. A capital fellow at a song after a mess-dinner. To be sure, his face is precious red, and not the handsomer for the jolly nose in the middle of it; yet it's evident he thinks himself an Apollo, for he is always bragging like old boots of the luck he's had with the women, particularly dwelling upon a certain pretty widow—"

"Skip that, dear!" said the younger cousin, interrupting the narrative.

"Hum—hum—hum," muttered the fair reader, rapidly passing over a passage. "Then there's

Potter, and Dawkes, and Chilvers all in our regiment. Very nice fellows, but prodigiously given to cheroots and bitter ale, and to talking about looting cashmere shawls, gold bangles, pearls and diamonds: in short, any pretty ornament that comes in their way; for looting, you must know, is plundering when a fort or town is taken by assault."

"Bless me, Geraldine!" exclaimed the elder, "what a strange set the poor boy has fallen amongst."

"So it seems, dear. But pray go on."

"How impatient you are, child. I daresay after all, there's nothing in the letter so *very* interesting."

She continued the perusal.

"Our colonel appears to be a very good sort of fellow enough, but is uncommon strict about duty and all that. Honey and sugar at mess, but at parade, by jingo, if any thing's amiss with your horse or accoutrements, doesn't he walk into you! It's no joke, I can tell you, if you get his monkey

up. I'm all right as yet, but Dawkes was in a precious scrape the other day, because the handle of his sabre came off when he drew at the word of command. Chilmers I think had done it in a lark; but as Dawkes didn't split, the row blew over, and nobody came to grief."

"Mischievous schoolboys, these brother officers of his," added the reader, with something like indignation. "But I'm surprised dear Fitz does not say any thing about—Oh, here it is."

She resumed her reading, but with a much more careful and impressive manner.

"Captain Calverley was the first to welcome me on my arrival, and has been uncommon kind and attentive ever since. I am in his troop, therefore we are very much together. And isn't he fond of talking of his visits to the cottage! And didn't he look pleased when I told him grandmamma was always mentioning him. Then he asked kindly after the two little girls, saying that they were the nicest little things he had ever seen."

"*Little* girls, dear?" repeated the young lady of seventeen; "nice *little* things. Of course he thinks of us as babies."

Geraldine's heart was too full for utterance; but her flushed face betrayed her mortification.

"Jones of ours," resumed the reader, "says he's no end of a brick, but that he's a tremendous lady-killer; the women at all the balls and parties making a dead set at him; every pretty girl thinking it quite a feather in her cap to be in love with the handsome captain."

The flushed face began to grow pale; even the voice of the reader betrayed uneasiness.

"But he assured me that they hadn't the ghost of a chance, for that a Begum had taken a fancy to him, that they were to be married after the campaign, and that the Governor-General had promised to give the bride away. She was rather coppery in colour."

"Odious woman!" cried the indignant reader.

"But then she had such heaps of tin; her lord would never be able to spend the half of it."

"I should not have supposed him mercenary," was then interpolated.

The listener said nothing; but her face was very pale and grave.

"I was engaged in a smart skirmish the other day. Indeed at one time I got quite separated and surrounded by a pack of mounted devils whose sharp crooked swords were flashing in my eyes in a manner very far from pleasant. I cut and thrust at them as fast as I could; but I gave myself up for lost, when, just in the nick of time, a horseman dashed into the group; my right-hand black fellow was sent out of his saddle, cut through his turban; my left-hand black fellow tumbled backwards, run through the body; and the others wheeled off at a gallop. If my captain had not come to my assistance in this plucky way, there's not a doubt in the world that you, dear little kittens, would have been a brother and a cousin out of pocket."

"I really am quite astonished, Geraldine, that Fitz should write in this unbecoming and thought-

less way about his own death. It's positively shocking; and I shall scold him well when I write. But it was very gallant of Captain Calverley to have come to the poor boy's rescue, wasn't it, darling?"

"Yes, dear," replied her cousin in a voice scarcely audible. The other regarded her tenderly. Presently Geraldine added in the same subdued tone, "What is a Begum, Fanny?"

"Oh, some horrible woman, not worth a moment's attention. Let me see what else your brother has to communicate."

"It's a trying kind of life out here, and as a great battle is said to be not far off, the risks will become tenfold. I often think of the dear old quiet home, the good kind grandmamma, and my pretty and affectionate playmates. It was a pleasant life. When I talk of it to Calverley he seems charmed, and wonders why I could give it up. By the way, he has just been appointed on the staff of our chief; and Jones of ours says that he is sure of promotion after this. Of course in

time he will become a great general, like Napier; and I, too, I hope; for I don't mean to throw away a chance of earning distinction. You shan't be ashamed of me, my dear little kittens."

"What a provoking creature he is!"

"If I fail in becoming a lady-killer, and in fascinating Begums as rich as Crœsus—"

"Oh, I shall skip all this rubbish."

"I hope to come back a general officer, with rupees enough to pay off the mortgages on Fitzmaurice Court, and a fortune for my dear sister, such as would be sure to secure her a worthy husband. So no more at present, &c. &c."

"I hope Fitz may not be disappointed. Hallo, here's a postscript!"

"Jones of ours has confessed to me that all he said about the Captain being a lady-killer, and going to marry the Begum, is a pack of bosh. He assured me that Calverley was one of the most quiet, gentlemanly fellows in the service, and had never troubled himself about any of the women out here—European or native."

"There, my pet!" cried the elder cousin exultantly; "you may let your dear little heart rest in peace. There is no cause for the slightest apprehension."

The fair young face, clothed in its brightest smiles, looked happy once more; and, on a suggestion that grandmamma would like to hear the letter, she rose with alacrity, and the two girls, with arms round each other's waists, hurried into the house, forgetful of parasol or hat in the corner, oblivious of *Childe Harold* on the ground, and regardless of the chasings and rollings over that poor little greyhound was experiencing on the lawn at the paws of the unchecked and perfectly independent Bob.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNPROTECTED FEMALE.

LUCRETIA BRABAZON, like a great poet after the publication of a popular work, awoke one morning and found herself famous. The hunting of Sambo attained as wide a fame as Chevy Chase. It became not merely the one theme for breakfast-table talk, for morning visitors, for the cover-side, for luncheon, for after-dinner, and general gossip at all hours of the day, but took up innumerable columns of provincial newspaper commentary.

Morning after morning her name figured in the "Local News," in the "Chit-chat," in the "Correspondence," and in the "Fashionable Intelligence." There was a leading article about her at least once a-week, and she flourished in the "Poets'-corner," to the exclusion of all other

subjects. Indeed, an enterprising printer in the county town got up a broad sheet illustrated with a sensation woodcut of the unfortunate Bushman in the act of being torn to pieces by ravenous hounds, while the whipper-in was having his head divided by the jaws of the devouring puma.

The colporteurs carried on a lively trade with this authentic work, particularly on market-days; but the press did not exhaust the interest of the subject. In every house, throughout the length and breadth of Cheshire, the startling narratives of Dick Wilcox and Will Tupper had so gained in incident as they circulated, that the limited household at Brabazon Lodge became multiplied into hordes of savages of the most ferocious aspect and race; and her one wild beast grew into a menagerie of the most frightful animals and reptiles ever exhibited.

At "serious parties" Miss Brabazon became an object of absorbing attention; the pious spinsters in the neighbouring villages had to vary their accustomed invitations to "tea and tracts," and the

Rev. Basil Plynlymmon, in consequence of his moderate personal knowledge of that heroine, and his actual though slight acquaintance with her extraordinary establishment, found himself elevated into the interesting notoriety of a returned missionary.

In truth, the thrilling narrative he was called upon to repeat at all general meetings of the Delamere United Bible and Blanket Club, of the ferocious attack of the untameable panther on Squire Scudamore's fox-hounds and whippers-in, was regarded, by his female listeners at least, as even more sweetly interesting than their long-established favourite tale, the account of the roasting and eating of the Rev. Jabez Muffington, by the horrid cannibals of Pungabatoo.

Greatly, however, as the reverend gentleman's visit to his fair parishioner had advanced his interests and his influence, he did not feel disposed to repeat it; not from any dislike of that young lady personally—far from it, he always spoke of her with marked respect, touching gently upon certain

doctrinal errors which, as he mildly said, she had been so unfortunate as to adopt during her residence among people scarcely a shade better than heathens. But it was evident that he did not approve of the free-and-easy manners of the Texan captain, that he did not like the aspect of his subordinates, and that he could not reconcile himself to the chance of an interview with "that dreadful puma."

There was nothing, however, to prevent his writing to Miss Brabazon. In his own mind there existed no doubt that it was his bounden duty to endeavour to the uttermost to remove the very heterodox opinions he had heard her express; and when this impression was confirmed by the judgment of a clerical friend who was very much in his confidence, and who, moreover, pointed out to him the pecuniary advantages that might arise from the establishment of a spiritual influence over a schismatic, with a large balance at her bankers, the Vicar of Little Delamere as resolutely set himself to work to carry on a controversy, as he

had done a few years before, to edit a Greek play.

Whether he was likely to meet with more success in one employment than he had found in the other, may be gathered from the following extract from one of the replies he had received to his kindly expostulations, and, as he considered them, eloquent arguments:

"It is just possible that I am very much in the dark regarding my way of life, but I intend to accept nobody's lantern, unless quite satisfied, not only that it contains a light, but one sufficient to show me the right path, to the end of my journey. Of those which have been presented to me for this purpose, I have found many empty, while others could boast only of a rushlight that always spluttered in the socket when a bright and steady flame would alone be of the slightest service.

"Thanks for the trouble you have taken. If among the blind the one-eyed is a king, in the dense fog in which you find me, your taper,

I suppose, ought to be considered an illumination. But, if you please, I will wait for the sunshine. For those who are in earnest in search of the truth, there must come a time when they shall walk in broad daylight. Neither taper nor torch, lamp nor lantern; no, nor gas-light of the greatest brilliancy and with the most approved burners, need then be had recourse to.

"At present I have no fear of stumbling. I have passed the most precipitous mountain-chains; surely I can be safe on the firm plateau of English common-sense—even in the dark. I do not discredit your pretensions as a guide, but I think it high time that I should be able to walk alone; notwithstanding my claims as that conventional example of helplessness—an unprotected female.

"I remember having a long argument with an intelligent Brahmin, but I failed to convert him because I could not satisfactorily dispose of some of his objections to the creed I wished him to embrace. 'You are,' he said, 'anxious to make it believed that you worship an almighty

and all-pervading spirit, higher above humanity than are the stars above the earth, yet is your religion singularly mundane and carnal. You are satisfied that there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage in the heaven in which you all desire to find a place, yet you rely on such domestic influences as existed on earth, principally filial and maternal, for your chance of this beatitude.'

"It was in vain that I assured the worthy man such ideas were not adopted by the community of which I was a member; but the worship of the Virgin and the Child has, in many parts of the East, become so thoroughly identified as the vital principle of Christianity, that I could not convince him it could be absent from any Christian profession of faith.

"You dwell a good deal on the idea of remodelling the Church of England. I have not the slightest objection; but why you should call yourself Anglo-Catholic I do not clearly understand. The English Catholic, according to my

benighted notions, is called a Roman Catholic, because he adopts the religion of Rome; but an English Protestant, who professes to be antagonistic to that faith, has no right to such a title. I hope that there is no juggle in its adoption. I am in the dark, you know, and of course cannot be expected to see things clearly, but it seems to me as if you were about to realise a metaphor of one of your cleverest statesmen. Have you found the Papists bathing, and are you trying to walk off with their clothes?

"As you seem so desirous of going further back than St. Augustine, suppose you retrograde a little further. It will bring you to Rome, for which I cannot help fancying you entertain a very strong interest. I think I threw out the hint before; that is, the return to a classical faith. It existed to a considerable extent in Britain, you know, once. By all means let us have a revival as it flourished in the seven-hilled city, in the enlightened era of imperial Augustus. Then who so worthy to be *Pontifex Maximus* as yourself?

Consider that you will have the appointment, not only of the Flamens, but of the Vestal Virgins. What a preferment! Pope or primate is a poor curate in comparison. I recommend it to your serious consideration."

The Vicar of Delamere Parva pondered a good deal over this epistle. He was a little shocked, and a trifle puzzled. He scarcely knew what to think of the writer. He came at last to the safe conclusion, that she was very eccentric—even for a strong-minded woman. Nevertheless, having the quality of perseverance dominant in his nature, he resolved not to give up his hope of making her a shining light in the Church—and a liberal contributor to its revenue.

The Reverend Basil Plynlymmon was far from being the only gentleman who felt an interest in Miss Brabazon. In society generally there existed an extraordinary amount of curiosity respecting her, but in no circle was this so strong as in the Delamere Hunt. Ever since the hounds had broken cover after poor Sambo, its members

felt that an apology was due from them to her, for this outrage upon her servant. No one, however, volunteered to be its bearer. Their knowledge of the composition of the establishment at Brabazon Lodge was limited; but it evidently sufficed. There was no desire to increase it by a personal inspection. The idea of a deputation was once started after a bowl of capital punch, but when it came to a selection of representatives, every one proposed his neighbour; never was so much modesty and self-denial displayed by the club since its establishment.

At last it was concluded amongst them, that one of their number would be quite enough, as the young lady might object to receive more gentlemen visitors, and with wonderful unanimity they pitched upon Tom Holyoake. In vain he tried to excuse himself; he was most moving in dwelling upon his own unfitness; he was most liberal in his estimation of the superior qualifications, for the office, of every one else. The club unanimously were of opinion that he was the right

man in the right place. So there was no help for it.

Mr. Holyoake walked his horse slowly in the direction of Brabazon Lodge, with the impression clearly fixed upon his physiognomy that he was a victim to circumstances. He had heard that the person of an ambassador is inviolable, but entertained misgivings as to the treatment of ambassadors by cannibals. In this mood he pushed open the gate, which, with the precaution of a fox-hunter, he placed back, so as to permit easy egress if he should find it necessary to make a start. At the first growl of the puma he had determined to put spurs to his horse, and gallop off as hard as he could.

He walked his hunter along the carriage-drive, looking warily about him. As soon as the house came in sight, he gave it a careful scrutiny. One of the parlour-windows was open, and at it he could see a Panama hat and a cloth jacket —a newspaper hid the face and the rest of the figure.

"This must be the Texan captain," thought Tom Holyoake.

"Hallo, Jolly-Nose! what brought *you* here?" was demanded from the open window.

"These yankees are so infernally cheeky," said the ambassador to himself.

The fox-hunter had drunk largely of port-wine. It had not only pretty frequently got into his head, but into his complexion — the crust, apparently, having chosen to monopolise a particular feature; and nothing irritated its owner so much as the slightest reference to it. He felt aggravated, therefore, at the unceremonious allusion, but was conscious that the success of his embassy, perhaps his life, depended on his keeping his temper; so he directed his steed towards the open window, and put on the most cordial look at his command.

"I must conciliate this fellow," he thought; "It won't do to put him out. I wonder where they keep that savage beast?"

"What brought you here, I say?" was repeated more sharply.

"My good fellow," cried the fox-hunter, in a peculiarly mild tone of voice; "I've come on a particular mission to Miss Brabazon, and I'll make it worth your while to procure me an interview with her."

Mr. Holyoake looked cautiously about him, peering into the bushes on the lawn, as if expecting to find a wild Indian crouching behind every tree.

"Particular mission, eh?" was the reply, in a scornful voice.

"The almighty dollar will do any thing with a yankee," thought the ambassador. "A crown-piece or two would, I daresay, be equally effective. At any rate I will try."

He rode close to the window, and said in a low confidential tone, bending in his saddle:

"It's important that I should see Miss Brabazon, if only for a few minutes. My name's Holyoake, of Mount Holyoake. I'm very well known in this county. Do me the favour to accept this to drink my health, and please to let

Miss Brabazon know that I am waiting to speak to her."

A hand was held out; the silver dropped into it, and immediately disappeared.

"Say your errand," said the same voice; "I'm Miss Brabazon."

Tom Holyoake was taken very much aback at this unexpected declaration, and did not regain his composure when he saw a laughing face raised from the newspaper, the feminine character of which was beyond dispute.

"Now then, out with it, Mr. Holyoake. What's your particular mission? I hope that you have not been bribing me without good and sufficient cause."

Tom Holyoake took off his hat and bowed with a face rather more full of colour than usual. He then, with no small amount of hesitation, circumlocution, and repetition, expressed the apology of the club, of which he acknowledged himself an unworthy member, for the unpremeditated and much regretted mistake of their hounds.

Lucretia Brabazon had had time to examine

her visitor, and could not fail to observe the eager glances he flung around him whilst making his statement. She felt much inclined to laugh, but knew that it was incumbent on her to meet the civility of the fox-hunters in a proper spirit. She therefore expressed her satisfaction in lady-like terms with the apology, and appeared willing to believe that poor Sambo had been hunted entirely through his own imprudence in running away before hounds in full cry; and for the subsequent hue and cry after him the gentlemen of the hunt could not help their pack, nor could the pack help themselves.

"Of course it was all a mistake," she admitted in perfect good humour. "Still I hope that it won't occur again. And as your hounds are so indifferent as to what game they follow, who knows but that they may give chase to me, should they catch sight of me in the fields."

Tom Holyoake assured her that such an event was impossible—the whole field would as one man rush forward to prevent it. He began now to in-

fuse a little gallantry into his assertions, though there was still a certain nervousness in his manner that betrayed his uneasiness.

"I am commissioned to inform you, ma'am," he continued, "of the general desire of the hunt that you should honour them with your charming presence at the next meet at Durdham Thicket, on Monday, at twelve. Should you not be provided with a suitable horse, the Squire will be most happy to mount you; and Lord Rossborough said that he would be delighted to drive you to the meet in his phaeton."

The strong-minded woman seemed by no means insensible to the compliment that had been conveyed to her, and at once accepted the invitation, though she declined both the Squire's and Lord Rossborough's proposals. The ambassador then considered that he had accomplished his mission; and the impatient pawings of the gravel and increasing restlessness of his hunter suggested the vicinity of some concealed danger. He therefore began to think it high time to make his adieux.

Miss Brabazon, however, thoroughly aware of his apprehensions, contrived to detain him.

"If you wait a little longer, Mr. Holyoake," she presently observed, quite demurely, "you will see my pet. 'Cruncher' we call him, from the rapid manner in which he disposes of the bones of his victims. He is just about to be led out for his constitutional."

"Cruncher!" muttered the fox-hunter, scarcely above his breath, his port-wine complexion paling its ineffectual fires. "Thank you, ma'am; I have a particular engagement. Much pressed for time at present. I wish you good morning, ma'am."

Tom again took off his hat and bowed, and the next minute was galloping out of the gate. He did not hear the laugh with which Miss Brabazon returned to the perusal of her newspaper. She was pleased as well as amused.

On the appointed day and at the appointed hour, that strong-minded lady made her appearance at Durdham Thicket, not without decided

gratification, but a little to the disappointment of the large cavalcade that the rumour of her expected presence had assembled. The fact was, very singular stories of her style of riding during part of her South American explorations had got abroad, and many of her neighbours had anticipated a peculiar exhibition of equestrianism.

Miss Brabazon cantered into the circle in a habit, with hat and veil, upon a well-bred lady's horse, and sitting on a side-saddle, instead of rushing into it on a wild mustang, in the thorough Amazonian fashion they had looked for; and she received the cordial greetings of the master of the hounds with perfect self-possession. She conversed in a lively but unaffected manner with Squire Scudamore, and with certain of his friends to whom she was introduced. She was quite at her ease; but there was no evidence of the intense "fastness" the spectators had been led to expect, except in her style of riding, which excited the admiration of the whole field.

At the close of the day's sport, Miss Brabazon, with the brush in her hat, returned home, highly gratified with her amusement. She had reason to be still more pleased with the favourable impression she had created. She had made the acquaintance of more than one lady-equestrian; and although there was a certain degree of reserve in their manner, it was no more than a stranger in her exceptional circumstances ought to expect.

There could be no doubt that from this time the general opinion respecting her became modified. It is quite true that none of the county matrons left their cards at Brabazon Lodge, but this may have arisen more from well-grounded apprehensions of its dreadful establishment and terrific menagerie, than from any social objections. A message was sent her from the considerate Duchess that induced her to relax considerably in her defiance of custom, and though she seemed to laugh at the expostulations of the Vicar, they were seldom entirely without effect.

She attended other meets, and every time gained

ground in the good opinion of the field; but she never would allow any of the gentlemen of the hunt to be her escort home, and resolutely declined their visits. Tom Holyoake took credit to himself for having done a daring thing, in accomplishing his mission; and a few of the more adventurous of his associates were quite willing to run the same risk; nevertheless, they received the check with which their advances were met, with wonderful equanimity. They were satisfied that they could not tolerate a household of savages, and the very name of "Cruncher" sufficed to extinguish all ideas of gallantry.

Lucretia Brabazon therefore was still left, when at home, to the enjoyment of her own society, and notwithstanding that she was unquestionably a very strong-minded woman, with this she became satiated. Her chief employment was to sit at the window and watch the rabbits and birds that came on the lawn around the broken sun-dial, and ran in and out of the shrubbery. Sometimes a snake would come gliding through the herbage; occa-

sionally a green lizard would dart across the sunshine; a shrew-mouse would now and then show its pointed snout among the leaves, and once or twice she discovered a blood-thirsty stoat, cautiously stalking its timid prey.

One day whilst thus occupied with a formidable volume of German metaphysics on her lap, she was agreeably surprised by the sudden appearance of an elegant low carriage, drawn by two beautiful white ponies. Two very lovely girls were in the front seat, the elder driving; and a small groom or tiger, in a well-known livery, with folded arms, sat behind.

Directly Miss Brabazon caught sight of the fair driver, down tumbled Hegel on the floor, and up sprang the solitary student with an exclamation of genuine delight. She rushed to the street-door, just in time to see the two girls leap lightly to the ground, and the boy-groom catch the reins, jump into the seat they had vacated, and trot the ponies along the carriage-drive to the other gate.

"And so you have absolutely had the courage to dare the dangers of my den!" she cried, addressing her first lady-visitors, with a look in which there was as much admiration as pleasure.

"My cousin," said the elder, introducing her companion with the least possible ceremony. "I promised Geraldine the gratification of becoming known to you; we have been brought up together, and I wish very much that all my friends should be hers."

Miss Brabazon regarded the fair face that met her gaze with genuine interest. Its ingenuous expression, mingled with the girlish curiosity and dread which the strange objects in the hall excited, formed a study for a painter. She expressed her acknowledgments warmly, then led her visitors to each of the objects of natural history most worthy of notice, and described how it had been obtained. As every narrative was necessarily an adventure in which she had figured as the heroine, the astonishment the appearance of the stuffed specimen created was increased by the knowledge

of the extreme personal risk undergone by the narrator, while assisting in its destruction.

The elder of the two, though exhibiting less surprise, was equally impressed with the peril of the encounter.

"My dear Miss Brabazon," she observed, "though a fox-hunter's daughter, and not quite unused to danger, I don't think I could have ventured to join you in such exploits. As for Geraldine, what would you say, dear, to attacking that grisly bear?" she asked.

"Oh, Fanny!" was the reply, with a start and look of affright. "I don't think I could face that terrible beast, unless—"

"Unless what, my dear?" inquired her new friend, kindly.

"Unless some one I loved were in danger."

Fanny Scudamore looked as if she understood the state of the case completely, and said nothing. Miss Brabazon regarded the youthful speaker more intently.

"A sufficient cause for fearlessness, even in the

most timid nature," she replied. "I suppose that was my reason for appearing so masculine," she added laughingly. "Some one *I* loved was in danger."

The quick glance of the two girls was full of feminine interest. "I mean myself," was added.

They joined heartily in her mirth.

"In all my hazardous adventures," she continued in the same lively manner, "however paradoxical it may seem, I really had a paramount regard for number one; and I suppose this sufficed to keep me from coming to grief."

She now led the way into the parlour—the same room in which she had received the Vicar of Delamere Parva—and her visitors were soon seated and gossiping with her, apparently as much at their ease, as if they had never heard of her barbarous attendants, and had forgotten the existence of the terrible "Crusher."

To say the truth, though, like the hunting-field at Durdham Thicket, the young ladies were a little disappointed. Miss Brabazon had thrown

aside the Panama hat, and though her hair was still unfemininely short, it had been carefully brushed, parted in the centre, and smoothed over the brows. The most objectionable portion of her costume, too, had totally disappeared. In short, though not so elegantly attired as her visitors, whose toilettes were, as might have been expected from their age and social position, studiously fashionable, she was unexceptionably clad.

The elder telegraphed a look to her cousin, when she thought herself unobserved, to which the latter replied in the same manner; but neither telegram was lost upon their observant hostess.

"Your visit has been somewhat unfortunately timed, my dears," observed Miss Brabazon. "I cannot show you my pet, who, notwithstanding his terrible reputation, is perfectly harmless. He was caught when a cub, and has been my playfellow ever since; but as I learnt that the knowledge of my having a dangerous wild beast, as my inoffensive puma was represented, deterred persons from calling on me I very much wished to see, with

great reluctance I sent him to the proprietor of a travelling menagerie, who happened to be at a neighbouring fair. Since then all my people have become so dissatisfied, that I have found it necessary to give them funds to pay their passage home."

"Goodness gracious, Miss Brabazon," cried the elder of the cousins, leaping from her seat, "those wretches cannot have left you in the house, without a creature to care for you!"

"I am quite alone!" was the reply.

"Come along, Geraldine," said Fanny. "Papa will set this shameful business all right, I'm sure."

It was in vain that the deserted lady tried to detain her impetuous friend by assurances of her perfect indifference to her position, and of her ability to defend as well as to wait on herself. Both girls had all their feminine sympathies awakened, and rivalled each other in their eagerness to procure Miss Brabazon immediate assistance. They promised to come to her every day, when they found that

she steadily declined accompanying them to Delamere Court.

The idea of a lady left alone in her house by her domestics seemed very terrible in their eyes. Had they known what a good riddance it was to the whole neighbourhood, they would more easily have reconciled themselves to their friend's fate.

As they appeared at the door, the two ponies came trotting down the drive. Then ensued hand-shaking and kissing with great fervour. At last the young ladies regained their seats, but evidently in a flutter of excitement.

"If cousin Potter were in England," said Miss Brabazon, "I could now make some use of him; but you see he is in India with his regiment. I have just had a letter from him, in which he gives an account of the great battle that had been fought with the Ameers of Scinde the day before the departure of the mail."

Fanny Scudamore, with the reins in her hand, was about starting the ponies, when she checked them. Geraldine turned suddenly pale.

"A battle did you say?" faltered the former. "Did he mention any of his brother officers?"

"Oh, several. In particular, a Captain Calverley, who he says greatly distinguished himself."

Geraldine's face flushed.

"He did not get hurt, I hope," the considerate kinswoman again faltered out.

"He is not among the killed or wounded. But one young officer of the same regiment, he says, was dreadfully hurt. He describes him as quite a boy, though he proved himself a most gallant soldier. He fell when charging a battery."

"Good-by, Miss Brabazon," exclaimed Fanny in a husky voice, as the ponies went off at a trot.

Geraldine's handkerchief covered her face.

"Poor dear Fitz!" murmured her cousin.

Both girls cried all the way to Delamere Court. Not a word more was spoken during the drive. The idea of their playfellow crushed and mangled, choked their utterance.

The visit, though attended with such a painful result to them, exercised a very pleasant influence

on the position of their new friend. Honest Jack Scudamore was highly indignant when he heard from his daughter how his neighbour had been treated, and at once despatched trustworthy members of his own extensive establishment to endeavour, as he said, to make the poor lady comfortable.

When the news spread, offers of assistance came from many quarters; indeed the next day Brabazon Lodge was besieged by morning callers of both sexes, not merely to leave cards, but to express the most neighbourly feelings.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHISWICK REVISITED.

ABOUT twelve months have elapsed since the conclusion of the last chapter. The conquest and annexation of Scinde had been completed, and some of the English regiments which had assisted in that glorious campaign had returned home.

It was in the warm twilight of a bright July day that a wherry, occupied by one rower, was proceeding along the Thames by the Middlesex bank, with vigorous pulls denoting a powerful pair of arms, but leisurely, as if the occupant was in no hurry to reach his destination. His moustache proclaimed him a military man,—that appendage then being rarely adopted by civilians,—but the pea-jacket, light waistcoat, and straw-hat on the seat behind him, the coloured shirt and white

trousers he wore, were unquestionable evidences of the amateur oarsman.

He was a handsome young man, with a frank soldier-like bearing, his complexion somewhat embrowned apparently by recent residence in a warm climate. It was clear, however, from the manner in which he handled his oars, that he was no tyro at this exercise.

As he glided past Chiswick, he stopped rowing opposite one of the prettiest villas, and contemplated it for some time with considerable interest. The green-verandahed cottage and richly-flowered lawn showed no sign of life, and with an expression of disappointment he was about to give a fresh impulse to the wherry, when his attention was attracted by a low musical laugh.

Turning his head quickly, he observed a light pleasure-boat approaching, rowed by two very elegant girls. Behind them sat a youth, with the rudder-lines in his left hand, the sleeve of his right arm being empty and fastened to his breast, and the delicacy visible in his face betraying the

unmistakable impress of a protracted struggle for life.

He looked earnestly at the figure in the other boat.

"By Jove, it's Calverley!" he cried with boyish heartiness and exultation. "I'm deuced glad to see you again, old fellow! Of course you've come to beat-up our quarters. No one could be more welcome. You needn't stare so at the girls; they're your old acquaintances, cousin Fanny and my sister Geraldine."

There was much cordial handshaking as the boats came alongside, and an interchange of expressions of warm gratification at the unexpected meeting. The girls appeared startled; but the surprise of Captain Calverley at the change that had taken place in their appearance was still more evident. He gazed from one to the other admiringly, trying in vain to identify them with "the nice little things" of a few years before.

"You see, old fellow," observed Lord Fitzmaurice apologetically, "the girls have been in

the habit of rowing me about in a niceish sort of a lake at my uncle Scudamore's; and they persuaded me to-night, as there was scarcely any one on the river, to go for an hour with them, as they know I like it."

Captain Calverley expressed his approval, indeed launched out in enthusiastic terms on the healthiness of the recreation. In his own private opinion he thought his young comrade amazingly fortunate in being able to secure such an attractive pair of rowers; but refrained from saying any thing likely to suggest the helplessness which had pressed them into his service.

Fanny Scudamore's vivacity he thought very charming; Geraldine's greater reserve, however, exercised an influence upon him scarcely less powerful. There was something too in her girlish loveliness so expressive—a combination of health, innocence, and grace—that he could not help regarding her with almost as much interest as admiration.

As the boats approached the bank, he shipped

his oars and hurried on the garments he had put aside. There was a boat-house in a little creek by the landing-steps; he remembered it well. He remembered too the place he had just passed over, where he had plunged after the sinking child, and could scarcely realise the idea that the corpse-like little face he had then snatched from the grave had changed into the blooming beauty before him. She also remembered the incident; and the recollection gave additional tenderness to the expression of her features.

"That's right, Captain; moor her in the old place," cried the disabled Cornet. "Of course you are coming with us, you know. I want to hear what's become of all those fellows I knew in India. Precious jolly we were too; especially at mess."

Captain Calverley fastened the boat and leapt ashore. He was immediately followed by his young comrade. He turned to offer assistance to the ladies; but as the one stepped lightly after her brother, the other dexterously secured the rope to the staple. He offered his hand; she just

touched it, as she laughingly sprang to the side of her cousin. He remarked the sense of happiness that flashed out of those brilliant eyes, and lit up that Hebe-like aspect, though quite unaware of the cause.

They now walked together up the gravel-path, —decidedly a joyous party. At least the questions and exclamations of Lord Fitzmaurice, the lively observations of Fanny Scudamore, and the replies of the Captain, were delivered in a tone the joyousness of which could not be doubted.

But the heart of Geraldine seemed too full to take part in such demonstrations. Her thoughts and feelings were in a tumult of pleasurable excitement. She was striving to recover her self-possession, and her cousin was loyally doing all she could to prevent her embarrassment from attracting notice.

The girls gave their hats and mantles to the little parlour-maid as they entered the house; the gentlemen having left their hats in the hall, they proceeded to the drawing-room. The visitor

readily recognised the peculiar furniture. The portrait of the departed Lord-Chamberlain did not appear to have been in the least disturbed: there too, in her accustomed place, sat his relict, her costume unaltered; but the fair face had become more wrinkled, the kind blue eyes more dim; while the shaking of the tall head-dress betrayed increased infirmity.

He crossed the room towards her, surrounded by his young friends.

"Captain Calverley has called to see you, grandmamma," cried Fanny Scudamore, advancing close to the old lady.

Her visitor made the profound old-fashioned bow that had formerly been so successful; but the dowager did not rise. She looked at him through her spectacles as if she did not see him.

"Of course, it's very pleasant on the water such a day as this," she replied. "At least, it always was so in fine weather, especially when I was in waiting. My dear lord used to say that a summer afternoon on the Thames—"

Here the speaker paused a moment, then continued,

"And the sweet Queen graciously acknowledged that my sarsnet saque was—well, well, we shall never see such a delightful time as that was at court. And his most gracious majesty always said that my Pompadour robe—"

There was another pause, apparently also from defect of memory.

"This is my friend Captain Calverley," sung out Lord Fitzmaurice.

"Oh, a friend of Captain Calverley!" the wrinkled features lighting up with animation. "Any friend of Captain Calverley is welcome—very welcome indeed. He was exceedingly well behaved,—what gentlemen of the court used to be. I assure you my dear lord was very particular who were admitted to their majesties; and when the sweet Queen held a drawing-room, I was of course—"

The Countess broke off again, and looked about her.

Miss Scudamore now tried to make her understand who was her visitor.

"Yes, my dear, certainly; nothing more natural," was the reply. "Indeed, I should be very glad to see Captain Calverley. I admired him extremely. Didn't the sweet Queen say that he was very like the Lord-Chamberlain? Or was it the charming Princess Royal, when we were walking on the slopes that day? let me see—"

The pause was repeated.

The young officer could not help feeling pained at beholding the effects of time in his old friend, and was getting anxious for an excuse to put an end to the scene; but the three young people commenced a simultaneous attack on their relative, and at last made her conscious of his identity.

The change was very striking. At first she stared at him through her glasses, when he took her extended hand, as if she found considerable difficulty in reconciling his present unpretending costume and appearance with the borrowed splendour of his introduction; but every thing having

at last been explained, the flutter of her spirits manifested her extreme satisfaction, and he was honoured with a seat placed close to her own, for the convenience of conversation.

Not that he was called upon for more exertion in that direction than on the previous interview; for, excepting a brief assent from himself, and an occasional attempt from one or other of her grandchildren to assist her memory, she had the talking all to herself.

In truth, she was wonderfully loquacious,—now and then somewhat incoherent, in consequence either of abrupt transitions of events, or confusion of persons about whom she thought proper to converse. Her visitor found it difficult sometimes to follow her disjointed recollections of favourite dresses, and important ceremonials, of particular members of the royal family, and what they had said to her under various remarkable circumstances; of distinguished personages about the court, and the peculiar homage they invariably paid her; and, more than all, of that long-

departed officer of the royal household, whose devotion to her and to his royal master formed the alpha and omega of her stately reminiscences.

While this was going on, Arthur could not help admiring the group before him: the picturesque relict of the Lord-Chamberlain, in her person rigidly maintaining the decorations that had won her honour and dignity in a former generation, having on each side, affectionately hanging over her, her beautiful grand-daughters, their several toilettes contrasting as forcibly with that of their aged kinswoman as did their fresh young faces with her shrunken colourless visage.

Lord Fitzmaurice had drawn a chair to the other side, and seemed to listen with equal respect and affection to her singular revelations. They would have been deemed trifling by most persons; by many they might have been considered unintelligible; but it was evident that they had a value and a meaning for the fond hearts that were clustered around her chair.

"Dear grandmamma, I don't think I ever

saw you in such good spirits," cried Fanny Scudamore.

"Captain Calverley's visit has done you a great deal of good, dear grandmamma," observed her cousin in the same high key.

"We must have him constantly amongst us, if his presence benefits you as much as this," added the young Viscount.

"Eh, what?" exclaimed the dowager, turning quickly from one to the other. "Oh, yes, Captain Calverley is in very good spirits. The gentlemen of the old court were remarkable for good spirits. The dear good king was never dull, and was always ready to encourage any proper amusement. And my dear lord too had excellent spirits. The household were particularly merry at Christmas-time, and the sweet Queen helped us to play at forfeits and hunt-the-slipper, and other harmless recreations. I remember so well," she continued vivaciously, "we were playing at blindman's-buff in the throne-room at St. James's, and I had just been caught by my dear lord, who placed the

handkerchief very carefully over my eyes, so as not to disarrange my head-dress. After I had had a good deal of rushing about, I caught somebody, and it was a gentleman. All cried out for me to name my prisoner, and of course I couldn't be certain. I thought it was my dear lord, as I knew he would prefer my catching him; and I made some jocular remarks about my always being sure to find what belonged to me, when through a fold in the silken bandage I contrived to take a peep at his face, and, lo and behold! who should it be but the dear good King."

All her audience laughed very merrily.

"I felt mightily confused, though, my dears, when I was obliged to name his most gracious majesty, and, the handkerchief being taken off, saw how amused every body was, and the sweet Queen most of all; but the dear good King put me at my ease in a moment, and he said—"

There was a sudden stop.

"His majesty paid you a compliment, dear grandmamma," cried Fanny Scudamore.

"The King said something to you, dear grandmamma, very gallant, of course," shouted Geraldine at the other ear.

"It wasn't fair to have peeped, though, grandmamma," cried her brother; "and perhaps his majesty said so."

"Eh, what? Well, I cannot remember what it was; but the last day of my waiting, my dear lord said to me—but this was in the summer-time, in August, after the last of the royal birthdays; for there were four birthdays of the royal family in that one month, which the sweet Queen graciously acknowledged to me was very remarkable, —and we went to Weymouth, as my dear lord had announced; and the darling Princess Amelia, who was the youngest, and was really wonderfully amiable to all the household, particularly to me, did me the honour to assure me, when I was eating prawns one morning at my breakfast, that—"

"That her royal highness was very fond of prawns; was that it, grandmamma?" demanded

the elder of her grand-daughters, with affectionate readiness, as soon as the dear voice stopped.

"Perhaps the princess had just come from her bath," kindly suggested the other in the same elevated voice.

"Didn't the Princess Amelia very much enjoy being at the seaside?" shouted the Viscount.

"Eh, what? To be sure, my dears. Every thing was arranged by the Lord-Chamberlain and the dear good King, and there was nothing my dear lord was so particular about as dress. The sweet Queen too was very particular about dress. The darling Princesses were all clothed handsomely, but neatly. Their royal highnesses' hoops were confined to a certain circumference, and the red heels of their shoes never permitted to exceed a certain height. There was a stated allowance for feathers and ribbons, for patches and powder, which the royal hairdresser and the royal wardrobe-women were obliged to bear in mind. It was really very amusing once," she continued, beginning to laugh as she took up her snuff-

box. "It was the dear good King's birthday, and all the royal family had new clothes, of course, and were sure to appear as elegant and grand as their royal highnesses' dressers could make them. And, would you believe it, my dears, the darling Princess Sophia came into the circle with her back-hair in an old puff-bag, and the white tiffany mixed with her royal highness's slab curls quite soiled. The sweet Queen observed it—for her most gracious majesty always kept a sharp eye upon their royal highnesses—yet would not take any direct notice before the company; but the dear good King, as soon as he detected the impropriety, declared in his most gracious majesty's usual gay, cheerful, affectionate, sharp, abrupt manner, 'Eh! what's this Sophy——'"

The *bon-mot* was arrested as well as the speech, and the venerable face again expressed the embarrassment that accompanied these failures of memory. Her grand-children once more tried to prompt her, but having no clue to the royal joke, the amusing portion of the anecdote was irretriev-

ably lost. Soon afterwards the Countess retired for the night; but not without addressing a cordial invitation to her visitor to come and see her often.

The young ladies retired with her, but were not absent long. They consigned her to her customary female attendant when they had led her to her chamber, and after many caresses ran to their own room, made certain alterations in their toilettes, with abundance of comments too confidential to be repeated, and then returned to the drawing-room.

What a memorable evening that was in the after recollection of every one of that group! How particularly delighted seemed the handsome cavalry-officer to find himself again in those pleasant quarters! How wonderfully "jolly," to use his own phrase, appeared his maimed comrade to renew their intimacy! How exquisite seemed the gratification which the younger of the girls experienced in realising a hope that had been so long and so fondly entertained; and how earnest was the elder that her cousin's accomplishments and

amiability should receive as much attention as her beauty! It was charming to see the way she induced her to sing touching German songs, to play exquisite airs on the harp, and to converse in French and Italian on subjects she thoroughly understood. Equally pleasant was the interest with which she displayed her cousin's portfolio of sketches, to the admiring amateur.

As for him—he seemed as if he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. But how was it possible for him to recognise the silent undemonstrative student of the Storm Rondo, and industrious little worker at the tambour-frame, in the radiant blooming woman, omnipotent in the possession of a thousand feminine fascinations! The change was marvellous. Nor was he insensible of the devotion she displayed to her cousin. This unselfish tenderness of nature was rare to him. An elder sister would scarcely have displayed such oblivion of her own claims to admiration.

He was not aware, when they were first asso-

ciated, how powerfully the condition of the one motherless child had appealed to the heart of the other motherless child, whose few years of seniority in her own mind invested her with a kind of matronly superiority, in which the first acquiesced with true child-like dependence; and that this attachment had grown with their growth, and strengthened with their strength.

Captain Calverley did not overlook Geraldine's attractions. He observed that she was fairer in complexion, and more delicate in features; her figure was as tall as that of her cousin, though not so full. In his eyes, her robe of pure white satin, flowered with silver, and trimmed with lace, became her wonderfully. She wore her silken hair in ringlets, with a half-blown rose on the right side; a gold comb supporting an open plait, placed gracefully at the back. Fanny Scudamore wore her hair in bands, which agreed well with the classical character of her features; and a small circlet of gold and precious stones bound her dark glossy head just above the brow.

Later in the evening, as he sat opposite his young comrade, with the ladies on each side of him, illumined by a blaze of light that came from a gilt candelabra in the centre of the table, when he turned to each, he found it difficult to decide which was really the more beautiful of the two.

The party did not break up till a late hour—indeed, the housekeeper having improvised sleeping accommodation for Captain Calverley, his friend put no restraint upon his desire to gossip; and long after the young ladies had left them, a lively conversation was maintained, in which Anglo-Indian subjects mingled largely with anecdote of "Jones of ours," Lieutenant Potter, Major Rafferty, Dawkes, and Chilvers, and others.

To these, with their cheroots and "brandy-pawnee," the reader will no doubt easily reconcile himself to leave the two officers, while admitted into a neat little bedroom on the upper-floor of the cottage, where sat the two girls in long night-dresses, before a large toilet-glass, brushing their back-hair, and talking in a low confidential tone,

such as might be expected from young ladies conversing considerably after midnight in a well-regulated household on particularly private affairs.

From their smiling faces, and the frequent little laughs that seemed to effervesce out of their conversation, there could be no doubt that both were very well pleased. They were discussing their visitor, apparently in as amiable a humour with him as with themselves. In this, one seemed to take much the larger share—the less communicativeness of the other, however, was far from proceeding from want of interest in the subject.

"Yes; I think him very much improved, dear," observed the elder. "Indeed, however nice he was when we first saw him, he is now absolutely handsome. He has quite a love of a moustache, and his whiskers are divine!"

"Don't you think, Fanny, that his eyes are—"

"So you confess to examining a gentleman's eyes, do you?" exclaimed the first, archly. "Oh, you sly puss! And you seemed afraid to look at

him. For all that, I do really believe you have studied every feature in his face."

"Oh, Fanny!"

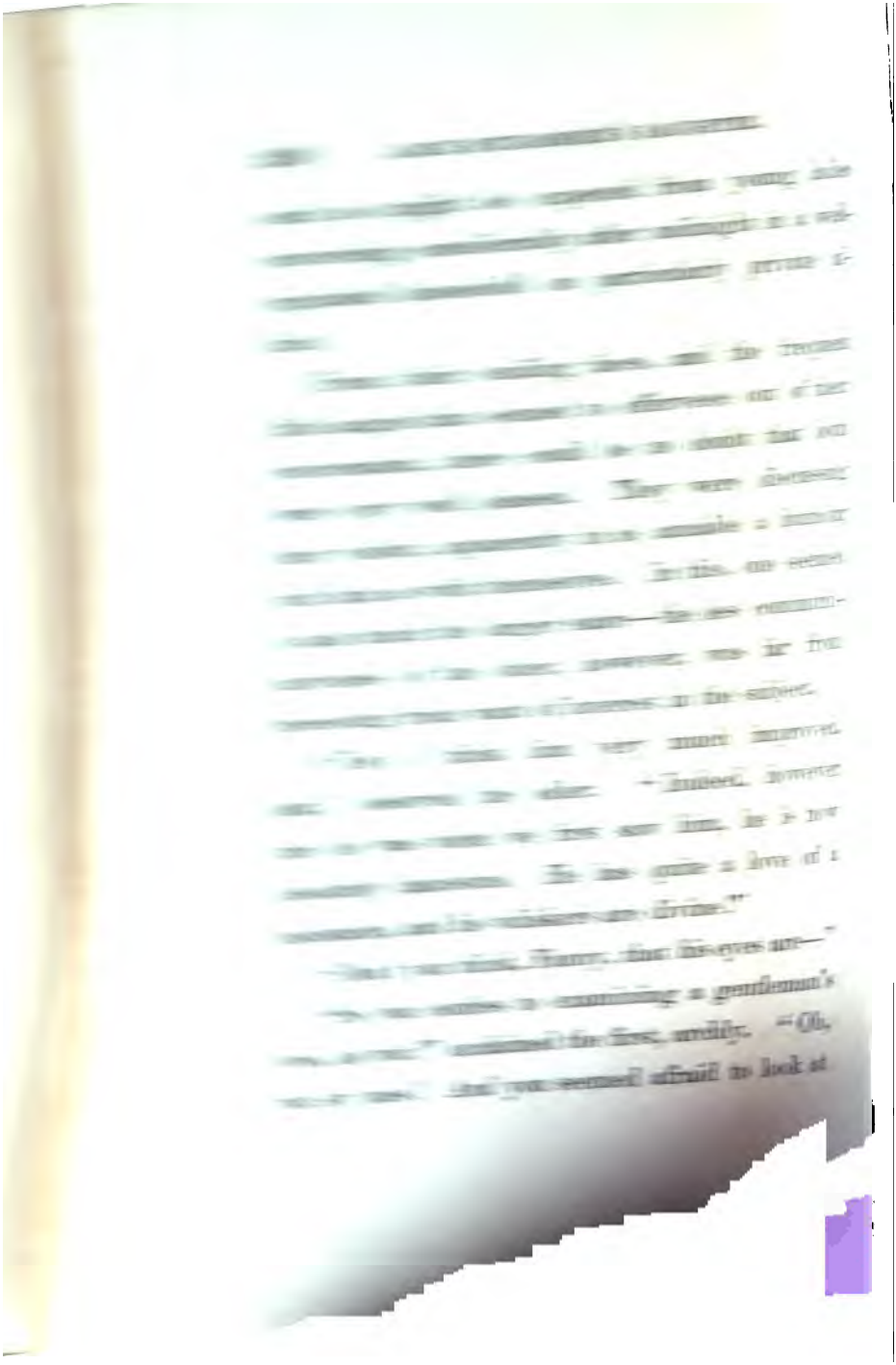
"You are quite as well aware as I am, that Captain Calverley's eyes are very expressive; that his smile is supremely charming; that his hair waves beautifully; that, in short, you never saw a countenance worthy to be compared with it, and don't believe such another is to be found. Eh, my pet?"

"I don't know, dear."

"Of course not. And you don't know that he has a handsome foot and a well-shaped hand; that his figure is faultless, and his manner singularly fascinating?"

"If I knew it ever so, I don't see what good it would be to me more than to any one else. He is sure to be admired wherever he goes."

Fanny Scudamore laughed. Presently she put down the ivory-backed brush she had been using, caught her cousin's head between her hands, and held it nearer to the glass.



that he may have for the winning. Mind that more than all."

"Oh, Fanny dear! How can I?"

"Nothing more easy, I assure you. You have only to be what you always are, good as gold, and he cannot fail to appreciate you at your full worth."

Geraldine paused in her work. She was evidently not quite so confident of her own power as her affectionate cousin. Nevertheless, the idea filled her innocent heart with a sense of happiness that expressed itself in her look, as she furtively scanned the lovely image in the mirror.

"But if he shouldn't care for me!" she said, with a solemnity that showed her apprehension of such a contingency.

"Nonsense, child. It is natural that he should feel a more than common interest in you. It would be a pretty thing, indeed, if a gentleman, after he had saved the life of a young lady, were to regard her with indifference. Such an outrage never was heard of."

Presently the toilet-arrangements seemed to be settled, and the brushes were returned to their proper places on the table.

"Now then, dear," said the elder, as she turned her chair round, with a more serious expression in her handsome face than had yet been seen there.

Geraldine placed her chair against the wall; then came and knelt at her cousin's feet, her eyes up-lifted to hers, her hands clasped and held by those of her cousin, and began in a sweet, simple, yet most reverential manner to repeat the prayers the latter had taught her when she came to Rose Lawn in her early childhood. The elder child had taken this duty upon her when her companion and pupil could barely lisp the words; and ever since the custom had been observed with the same matronly tenderness by the one, and the same childish trustfulness by the other.

The Lord's Prayer was followed by the Belief; the Belief by a hymn; then one of the beautiful Collects was succeeded by a short prayer that

was both a general blessing and an earnest thanksgiving. Nothing could be more simple, nothing more sincere, than the manner in which this long-established custom was performed. It was impossible to say which countenance wore the more touching expression while it lasted, and a more impressive picture of devotion and reliance than the two girls then presented could not be imagined.

When this was over there was a mutual embrace, with a seal of perfect affection. Then they both sought the modest little French bed they had shared during so many pleasant innocent years, and were soon enjoying the slumbers of the pure and good—happy in their intense enjoyment of the present; happier, a thousand times happier, in their profound ignorance of the future.

CHAPTER IX.

DELAMERE COURT.

ARTHUR CALVERLEY shortly afterwards received an invitation to Delamere Court, which he very gladly accepted; for if there was one person among the friends of his youth whom he ardently desired to see again, it was "honest Jack Scudamore."

He had more than one reason for wishing to revisit his native county; for although several of his most flourishing connexions, on his return to England with a high reputation and excellent prospects of promotion, had recognised his relationship with the usual social favours afforded by the governing families to their promising cadets, there were others in Cheshire by whom he desired to be remembered.

The invitation was eminently characteristic; but a passage or two of the Squire's letter must suffice:

"My girl tells me that she has recently seen much of an old friend of hers and of mine, and I don't see why the pleasure she has found in meeting him again should not be shared by her dad; so I must try and persuade you to leave the empty idlers about town, with whom you are obliged to associate, and come and join a set of the best fellows in the kingdom. Instead of lounging listlessly about Bond Street, you shall be mounted on one of the best horses in my stables, and see the noblest sport that has ever been enjoyed since the days of Nimrod.

"By George, sir, let me tell you that there are no such foxes as can be drawn from my coverts; no such hounds for hunting them as you will find in my kennels; no such riders across country as my neighbours and associates in the Delamere Hunt; and no such horses for speed and bottom as you may behold at every

meet during the season. My own stud was never in greater force. I can offer you the choice of Happy-go-lucky, out of Desdemona, whose sire was Tippitiwitchet, a capital fencer; or Little Pickle, own brother to Will-o'-the-Wisp, will carry you well; or Boadicea, sister to the Black Joke, out of Messalina, a mare of immense power. There are half a dozen more almost as good, that will go at any thing. Come and choose for yourself.

"The Duke is down here; so is my lord; so is Sir Harry; in short, nearly all the crack riders of the old hunt, with some new fellows who have lately joined. A different sort to your dandy idlers, all perfume and starch, who hang about Long's and White's. You will find my friends uncommon pleasant company. By Jove, sir, there is not one amongst them who wouldn't treat you as a brother for my sake. There hasn't been much doing here of late. Old Parson Tootles joined the meet last week at Warrington Level; his horse bolted with him at the

burst, and left him in the middle of the brook at Snagsborough Bottom. Harry Juniper had a turn-up with a gipsy at Mapleton races, for cheating him at prick the garter, and beat the rascal to a standstill. A main of cocks was fought in a barn near the cross-roads at Chilcote; and Tom Stapleton's bird won. The widow Wagshot, who kept 'The Traveller's Rest' by Warrington Coppice, has married Lord Vernon's gamekeeper; and Toby Winkles, who was the best horse-doctor and cow-leech for thirty miles round, coming home drunk one dark night, tumbled into the mill-stream, and was drowned. By the way, my girl told me the obligation we are all under to you for your gallant rescue of my niece a few years back. It is not likely to be forgotten by any of us—certainly not by your old acquaintance Jack Scudamore. Confound you, sir! If you don't come and give him an opportunity of expressing his thanks, he'll start the whole hunt for London, and carry you off to Delamere Court before you can say Jack Robinson. I will, by George!"

Of course there was no resisting this; so in a few days the Captain found himself a guest at Delamere Court, with the hearty old Squire more hearty than ever; and the whole household, from the fat housekeeper to the smallest of the stable-boys, rivalling each other in helping to make his visit agreeable to him.

The mansion was a large straggling one, of modern construction—that is to say, not more than a century old—intended to be in the Italian style, but it was what was so considered at the commencement of the reign of George III. What part of Italy could have laid claim to its invention, it would have been difficult to say. It certainly was not Roman, nor Florentine, nor Venetian. What architect had originated it, it was quite as difficult to decide. From Vitruvius to Palladio, and from Palladio to our own time, there was not one who would not modestly have disclaimed the honour.

There, however, it was—an imposing edifice, certainly, though not quite in the sense the Eng-

lish Palladio intended; imposing in its door, in its windows, and in its chimneys; more imposing in its tall pillars and stupendous dome. These looked well at a distance—looked better at a great distance; indeed, as it had been erected on elevated ground, the greater the distance the more architectural enchantment was lent to the view.

The friends of the proprietor were not critics; and throughout the neighbourhood the estimation in which the place was held as a building might have been traced in its common appellation, "the great house." Every body knew it, rich and poor; and no one ever entered its hospitable walls who had felt more disposed to find fault with its architect than with the strong ale, or the excellent claret for which it had always been famous.

When Arthur Calverley jumped out of his chaise, and received the Squire's energetic welcome at the principal entrance, he forgot the faults of the structure; indeed, he would have done so had the place been as obnoxious to censure as certain edifices lately constructed at South

Kensington; and as he shook his young friend by the hand, he seemed to shake out of him all faculty in fault-finding. Under the influence of his hearty laugh and cheery exclamations, the proportion of the rooms the visitor entered seemed as perfect as their heavy furniture was old-fashioned.

He had scarcely time to notice the pictures, but soon became aware that the animal painters were there in great force. Dogs and horses, dead game, and cows in a meadow, hunting and shooting scenes, clever works by Stubbs, Moreland, Blake, and Davis, were suspended from the walls; and foxes in a glass case, and stuffed game-birds, were every where interspersed with racing-cups, and the ordinary trophy of the chase.

But the most observable object in the house was his host. He had grown stouter; his hair was thinning on the forehead; but his eye was as bright, his cheek as rosy, and his voice as mellow as ever, as he strode on in his green hunting-coat, buff waistcoat, leather breeches, and top-boots—a costume from which he never varied for any

thing or any body—with his inseparable companion Jowler, a large fox-hound that had grown either too fat or too old for the chase.

As soon as the young officer had had some refreshment, he was shown every thing in and about the house that was most worthy of attention. The several racing-cups were brought under his notice with no slight degree of exultation; but this was exhibited only while insisting on the merits of the horses that had won them. Paintings of favourite dogs and horses were dwelt upon with the same pride, not unfrequently leading to the relation of anecdotes of their sagacity and courage, or of incidents of the chase, given with a vivacity and emphatic expression of certain words that could not fail of impressing them upon the memory.

Then they went to the stables and the paddocks, and the visitor was introduced to the widely-celebrated stud. It well deserved its fame. In racehorses and hunters it contained some of the finest in the world. Captain Calverley saw at a glance that such an establishment could only

be maintained at great expense, for the number of trainers, jockeys, and stablemen seemed prodigious; but the most admirable order prevailed. What was even more pleasing than the signs of good, as well as liberal, management he observed every where, were the evidences of attachment towards the owner and master.

As soon as his voice was heard, out rushed every servant, from the highest in authority to the meanest helper, displaying the most earnest alacrity to be of service, and evidently delighted at his presence. He had a kind or encouraging word for all; called each familiarly Jack, Tom, Harry, Bob, or Dick, and asked after their wives or mothers as kindly as if they had been his nearest blood-relations. When the Captain saw every face glowing with pride and affection, as he thus addressed them, he ceased to wonder at his friend's success in the stable.

Every horse too seemed to welcome his approach, and, when he called them severally by name, would turn round to him in the box, or

trot towards him in the paddock, and evince their recognition by the most cordial equine demonstrations. In the kennel his friends were still more lively; indeed, it was surprising to see the mutual good understanding that prevailed between them and him, while the gray old huntsman Tom Rogers, who did the honours of the place, stood by, bare-headed, heartily enjoying the scene, although he must have seen it repeated times out of number.

The visitor was formally introduced to all the principal officials in this extensive establishment —breeder, huntsman, whipper-in, jockey, steward, and butler; and at once cheerfully recognised as a friend of their master, to whom it would be their greatest gratification to show every possible attention. All seemed to possess the same comfortable aspect; indeed, this prevailing expression of jollity gave them a sort of family likeness.

The most memorable of these pleasant ceremonials occurred when the Captain was ushered into the housekeeper's-room, and there presented

by his host to an exceedingly well-dressed, well-fed, well-mannered dame, who had the domestic management of the house. He never forgot the dignified curtsey with which she received him, the affable smile that illumed her most cherubic cheeks, nor the mellow laugh that shook her ample proportions, when the Squire intimated, at the close of his little speech, that his friend had come expressly to taste her cherry-bounce.

In a very little time a brimming glass of that far-famed cordial was presented to both. Arthur Calverley shared in the honour of drinking the old lady's health, and in the enjoyment of her exceedingly jovial acknowledgment of the distinction conferred upon her. The Squire's satisfaction at the scene was intense, as he, with a sly sense of the humorous in his glance, recommended the Captain to cultivate her acquaintance out of regard for her highly domesticated qualities. Again resounded the mellow laugh through the ample room—the broad shoulders rose and fell in rapid jerks, and the expansive face glowed like the

rising sun in harvest-time, while she repeated her respectful curtsey, as she opened the door for their departure.

Arthur passed the rest of the day alone with Mr. Scudamore, gaining much pleasant information respecting the new friends he was about to make; for a hunt-breakfast was to come off in the morning, the meet having been arranged to take place in the neighbourhood of the house, close to a covert where a fox was sure to be found.

He was roused by Tom Rogers by times, and having equipped himself in a new Melton-Mowbray turn-out, which he had procured for the occasion, soon made his way to a large breakfast-room, opening on a closely-mown lawn, which lay between the mansion and a noble sweep of park, that spread out as far as the eye could reach. It was broken by masses of foliage here and there, clothed in their richest autumnal tints, made by belts of magnificent timber, plantations, groves, and avenues of oak, chestnut, sycamore, and lime.

Already he could see grooms holding splendid hunters, or walking them about, and a line of horsemen in red or green coats could be discerned cantering towards the house, over the turf or along the carriage-road. Jack Scudamore was at the door, bare-headed, but, save his velvet-cap, in his ordinary hunting-suit, with his cheery voice welcoming every comer; and the interchange of jovial hails, joyous recognitions, hilarious shouts, and earnest hand-shakings, among the members of the Delamere Hunt, gave to the scene an aspect of extraordinary animation.

Presently they came thronging into the breakfast-room in the highest spirits, peals of laughter drowning the buz of many cheerful voices all eloquent with good-fellowship; the ruddy face of the host glowing like a sun amongst them, and his mellow tones, as rich in welcome as in mirth, could be heard provoking the joyous burst that kept resounding through the room.

Captain Calverley was introduced to the leading members of the fraternity; and though the

fashion of the ceremony was not exactly what town-bred etiquette sanctioned, its heartiness recommended it more strongly than any more formal introduction could have done. As honest Jack Scudamore's friend, the visitor's claim to be their friend was recognised without the least hesitation. He was not only at home amongst them: he was one of themselves.

Arthur never forgot that breakfast. The gods may have existed in Elysium,—I do not like to dispute such a classical fact; but that they ever enjoyed themselves half as much as did Jack Scudamore's guests, even Dr. Smith cannot make me believe. Besides, there is no authority I can rely upon which asserts that either Hebe or Ganymede brought to table such devilled kidneys, such broiled bones, such venison-cutlets, such partridge-pie, besides more than a dozen equally-enticing hot delicacies that were placed before the members of the Delamere Hunt. As for the huge round of beef, the juicy ham, the fat capons, the collard head, and the score of equally-tempting

cold meats on the sideboard, which the butler and steward were carving as if for their lives, nothing half so solid was ever seen in Olympus.

Then for liquors there were tea, coffee, and chocolate, either of which would have beat nectar and ambrosia out of the field. That they were at least twice as good as either, was as undeniable as the fact, that they were dispensed by a cup-bearer who was more than twice as big as her male and female prototypes; for Mrs. Lavender, whose person was invested with the distinguishing marks of a prize housekeeper, superintended the breakfast-equipage at a side-table, assisted by an ample staff of footmen and maids.

There was another member of the establishment who seemed equally busy. This was Dawkins. The old fellow stood in a corner filling tankards with claret and ale—the greatest demand being for the latter; and no such tipple as the Squire's malt could have been known to the gods, let the classical scholars say what they will. Had Jupiter ever had a barrel of it in his cellar, Mars,

Mercury, Vulcan, and all their immortal *confrères* who figure in a certain passage in the Latin grammar, would have been a much jollier set of fellows than they are made to appear there.

The rattle of cups and small-talk, the clatter of knives, forks, and sporting jokes, the stir of forty not only feeding but laughing like one, came to an end at last. The cry now was "to horse!" and with increased hilarious energy the whole party thronged out; some through the windows on to the lawn, some by the door, to mount their hunters or hacks, and join the meet. Some lingered for "more last words;" but they were evidently of a totally different character from those so liberally produced by the pious Mr. Baxter, for they invariably elicited what, north of the Tweed, is known as a guffaw, often accompanied by an equally vigorous slap on the back; and then narrator and hearer made a rush for their caps and hunting-whips into the hall.

The mounting and riding to cover was a no less joyous scene. Such shouting and laughing

of the riders; such prancing, sidling, and rearing of the high-mettled steeds; all the former in strict hunting-costume as adopted in Cheshire, and looking as full of manly energy as of good-humour; and the grooms in attendance had quite enough to do to escape being ridden down, the horses seemed so fresh and the gentlemen so heedless.

Arthur Calverley had selected a fine roan gelding named Little Pickle, and found him ready with Tom Rogers in attendance. How the old huntsman had contrived to get his breakfast he could not then have surmised, for there certainly had not been time for satisfying even the most moderate appetite; but he knew subsequently that a good pull at the black-jack generally formed his morning meal.

It was evident to the young officer that he had been confided to the old fellow's care; for after a hurried examination of girth and bit, and confidential directions as to the management of Little Pickle, he desired the Captain to keep him in

sight, and follow him as closely as he could. This he readily promised.

He could observe that, notwithstanding their apparent preoccupation, the members of the hunt were watching his *début* with a good deal of that kind of interest hunting-men usually take in the first essay in the field of a stranger; and as his steed thought proper to go through a good many violent equine demonstrations as soon as he had leapt into the saddle, he found himself obliged to display all his knowledge of equitation. The result, however, seemed satisfactory to all parties. Little Pickle presently cantered off in the required direction; and the more curious of the rider's new acquaintances went their way also, apparently as well contented.

At the cover side Arthur found his host among the hounds, calling several to him by name, and encouraging them by commendations that seemed thoroughly understood and appreciated. As he saw them disappear in the brushwood, he could not but acknowledge that they well deserved their reputation.

The noisy banter and hilarious shouting among

his associates ceased at once, and the same attention and decorum they now displayed prevailed amongst the farmers and farm-labourers that the inspiring spectacle had attracted. All were listening for the first evidence of a find, and all were tolerably quiet; indeed the least indication of noise was checked by a monitory sign from the Squire, which effected its object completely.

Except with Little Pickle. His rider could not get him to stand still. He would bound about, and kept showing so decided a desire to begin the chase by himself, that the Captain had very great difficulty in holding him in. In vain the master of hounds held up his finger. Arthur did his best to restrain his horse's impatience; but without success. At last he carried him right away from the assembled horsemen, who were evidently enjoying this exhibition of spirit. While he was turning him round, Arthur heard the inspiring cry of the hounds, and the view-halloo of the huntsman, and saw the rush of the field. The fox was breaking cover.

Though his steed was in the rear at the start, from the speed with which he followed he entertained no fear of being thrown out. He looked for Tom Rogers; but not a vestige of that worthy was to be seen. He looked for the Squire; he too was invisible. There was nothing for it but to try and get up with them. It was, however, very humiliating to find himself the last of a large field, in whose good opinion he earnestly desired to establish himself; particularly as he could see some of them occasionally turning their heads round and grinning.

But fortune favours the bold. He took as direct a line as he could, and presently found himself in advance of the more prudent riders, who preferred practicable gaps or open gates to break-neck leaps. Little Pickle evidently cared about as much for their example as for their company, and followed the track of the most daring.

He took his timber admirably, though the fences were generally high and the banks steep, and he was an uncommon good goer. In truth, so

rapid was his pace, that the young cavalry-officer had not passed through many fields before he beheld the pack in full cry, with the *élite* of the hunt following gallantly over hedge and ditch,—still, however, too far off for him to recognise them personally, particularly as, with the exception of those who looked back, he could not see their features.

However, he was satisfied that he was fairly establishing a reputation as a rider to hounds, and notwithstanding that those in advance prided themselves on riding the best horses in the county, he was evidently gaining ground. Presently he was able to recognise the Squire, well up, riding by the side of his friend the Duke of Porchester, and followed by nearly all the field, making for a bridge a little to the left of the line the hounds had taken. Some three or four thought proper to continue their course, and after them went Little Pickle.

Arthur could now plainly see them looking back and laughing, evidently taking his following them as an excellent joke; nevertheless he held on

his course, every minute lessening the distance between them. Presently he became aware that a formidable obstacle lay in the way of his further progress. What looked at first like a mere rill widened as he approached to a broad brook, which the bridge spanned a quarter of a mile further up; and there he could see several of the hunt had halted and were watching his proceedings.

He had entered the meadow through which it flowed just in time to observe those who preceded him take the leap. Lord Vernon's horse was the first; but he apparently did not like the look of it, for he either checked himself or slipped as he approached the margin, and threw his rider over his head into the water. Lord Rossborough's horse now went at it; but his leap was too short, and he came with a terrible splash into the deepest part of the stream. Then came Sir Harry Chester. His horse's fore-feet touched the bank on the other side; but as he could not get a secure footing, he tumbled backwards with his rider among the weeds.

All three were struggling in the brook, looking very pitiful objects, when Little Pickle came with a tremendous rush to the brink, made a spring like a deer, and carried his rider clear over. As the latter rode away, he could not resist the temptation to glance back, and repay with compound interest the grins with which he had been favoured.

In a few minutes he found himself in advance of the field with Dick Wilcox and Will Tupper, before him the hounds close packed together, sounding their inspiriting cry in full chorus, tumbling into the next field, a very large one, and sly Reynard stealing along the hedge at its further extremity, making towards a flock of sheep huddled in the corner.

This ruse, however, did not avail him. The Southdowns were shy of his company, for they fled at his approach, exhibiting the usual signs of sheepish terror; so he contented himself with leaping a gap in the hedge, and making strong running for a wood that lay at the extremity of the lane on the other side. But the pace he had gone,

or the fleetness of his pursuers, prevented this, for he was run into in the lane and killed.

Dick Wilcox had just given the Captain the brush when the Duke and the Squire came up. Both were cordial in their congratulations; but Jack Scudamore's voice seemed more joyous than ever as he hailed his young friend with a look of radiant delight as a true fox-hunter, while shaking him by the hand—a ceremony Arthur had to go through with all the hunt as they individually made their appearance.

He had another mount here. Little Pickle having done enough for the day, he was taken in charge by a groom, and the Captain presently found himself upon Happy-go-lucky, a hunter of at least equal reputation. Others of the hunt got their second horse here; and as they found another fox in the wood, in less than an hour the pack were again in full cry.

But I need not go into any further details of that day's sport. Let it suffice to say that they killed three times; and that when they turned their

course homewards, Arthur Calverley had become quite a popular man with the Delamere Hunt, to the intense gratification not only of honest Jack Scudamore, but of his equally well-pleased patron and tutor, Tom Rogers.

The members of the hunt reassembled round the Squire's hospitable board a little after sunset. The dinner was substantial rather than elegant; the giver of the feast had no taste for French cookery, but prided himself on the real fox-hunter's fare he set before his friends, such as haunches of venison, saddles of mutton, sirloins of beef, poultry and game, puddings and pies; so that if the table did not groan under its load, it was simply because of its very solid construction.

However unfashionable the dinner may have appeared, none of the guests seemed inclined to find fault with it. Indeed, the jollity and good-humour that had prevailed at breakfast were now redoubled, talking and laughing going on apparently very little impeded by the eating and drinking.

Arthur Calverley was made to sit at the right hand of his jovial host, and the chair at the other end of the long table was well-filled by the popular lord-lieutenant of the county. It was assuredly a holiday with the Duke when he could escape from his ministerial labours in town, and join his hunting-friends in Cheshire, and it was enjoyed with all the *abandon* of a schoolboy. The young Captain was too far off to hear what his grace said; but the frequent peals of laughter from his immediate neighbours, and the expression of his dignified patrician features, ought to have convinced any one of the pleasure he took in the entertainment.

It was not, however, till after the cloth had been removed, that the social spirit of the company was thoroughly developed. As the claret flowed, the gossip, the jest, the anecdote, the narrative flowed with it. Every one seemed ready to contribute something to the table-talk. It was almost always of a sporting character, rarely had any novelty to recommend it, and each talker suffered

under the disadvantage of sharing the attention of the company with half-a-dozen others; nevertheless the talk invariably elicited a generous recognition of its claims on the notice of those to whom it had been addressed.

Here and there arose attempts at what is known at such meetings as "chaffing." For instance, Tom Holyoake's rubicund features were made to assume an additional glow during a fire of inquiries as to the progress of his intimacy with the fair tenant of Brabazon Lodge; and Sir Harry Chester was "roasted" in a similar manner because he had been seen suspiciously riding out of one of the Lodge-gates. Then followed much exaggerated gossip about the sayings and doings of that remarkable lady, which ended with lively recollections of the hunting of poor Sambo,—by all accounts "the most stunning run" of the season.

The conviviality was presently increased by a little singing. The Squire, at the earnest request of his guests, setting the example with a spirited performance of a well-known hunting-lyric, which,

although heard there times out of number, was received with as much applause as if it had been a novelty to all. Bacchanalian and hunting songs followed in tolerably quick succession. Tea-totalism was not in vogue in these days; and therefore the invitations in the former to drown all care or pain in the bowl seemed as natural as the "Heigho, tantivy! hark forward, hark forward, tantivy!" of the latter.

Port followed claret, and the guests were becoming more eloquent as well as more musical, when Tom Holloway deposited a huge bowl of punch before his master, whisking it round with a fox's brush amid a general clapping of hands and other lively demonstrations. The glasses were soon filled and appropriated, and then toast succeeded toast. Some, to the uninitiated, might have appeared enigmatical; but there could be little question that they contained the elements of good-fellowship, as applause and laughter recognised their claims to general acceptance.

When three or four glasses of this favourite

beverage had been swallowed, several members of the hunt began to show a somewhat excitable state of mind and body. Some got on their chairs to make speeches; others stood up to recite "Tom Moody," holding fast by the table with one hand; two vocalists volunteered their services simultaneously, and bawled away in happy ignorance of the efforts of the other; while the Duke, having proposed the health of "Honest Jack Scudamore," the rest had jumped on their seats, with one foot on the table, and, waving their empty glasses round their heads, were shouting nine times nine.

Just as the host was about to rise, a pair of delicate white hands were passed over his eyes, a soft fair cheek was laid lovingly against his own, and an inexpressibly tender voice murmured into his ear:

"Guess my name!"

The astonishment of the company at beholding the sudden apparition of a young lady in a riding-habit was expressed not only in their looks but in their silence; for the Duke, as soon as he had

perceived her, had bent forward with a loud "Hush!" with his forefinger on his lip. The cheer died a natural death, so did the oratory, and so did the singing.

The Squire seemed more completely taken by surprise than any one. He evidently could not speak.

"Guess my name!" repeated the soft whisper, which now every one heard distinctly.

"Fanny, for a thousand!" he at last shouted.

The loud applause that burst from his guests as each carefully strove to gain the floor, in a perpendicular, not in a horizontal, position, would have assured him of the correctness of his guess, if a pair of arms had not been thrown lovingly round his neck, after a veil had been raised from the hat, and disclosed the lovely features of his daughter.

Arthur Calverley was not the least astonished of the group round that hospitable table. He had left Miss Scudamore at Chiswick only a few days before, and had not entertained the most remote

idea, when accepting her father's invitation, that he should have the pleasure of meeting her in Cheshire.

"Well, my lass," cried the delighted Squire, as he clasped her round the waist and drew her closer to him, "what, in the name of all that's wonderful, brought you here?"

"Saladin brought me here, papa!" she replied with an arch laugh.

"What! the Duke's Arab?" he demanded in a tone and with a look of the utmost surprise.

"Yes, papa. Grandmamma is on a visit to the Duchess; and I so very much wished to see you, papa, that I begged permission to ride to Delamere Court. I looked into the stables, and took a fancy to the only new horse I found there; got a side-saddle put upon him; and attended by young Tom Wilcox, rode across country without drawing bridle."

"Saladin has never carried a habit," observed the Duke, a little alarm mingling with his admiration. "And I found him so difficult to manage,

that I should not be in a hurry to mount him a second time."

The members of the hunt looked from one to another in pleased surprise.

"And the distance from the Castle is five-and-twenty miles as the crow flies," added their host. "By George, about as stiff a line of country as can be found in all England!"

There was a murmur of applause round the table. Each of the orators looked as if he should like to make a speech, only he had not the proper words at command.

"I daresay it was extremely naughty of me," she now said deprecatingly. "But you know, darling papa, it is so very long since I saw you last."

The excuse was all-powerful, and, accompanied by an irresistible smile, was considered so satisfactory that the fond father could not offer so much as a word of remonstrance.

"I shall go at once and change my habit," she added, as she released herself from her father's

embrace. "And those gentlemen who may wish for tea, will find it ready for them in half an hour in the drawing-room."

As she said this she looked towards Arthur Calverley. More than a dozen chairs were vacated while she was crossing the room, but he was first at the door. He opened it for her, and received for his recompense a smile that either of his rivals would have readily risked his life to have obtained.

On returning to his seat he found the Duke proposing the health of Miss Scudamore in language that made the Squire's face glow with pride. His grace was cheered to the echo by the rest of the guests, who were evidently the young lady's admirers to a man.

Arthur knew that his friend took a pride in his hounds; he knew that he took a pride in his horses; he was equally well aware that he was proud of his fine house and fine estate; but he now learnt that hounds, horses, mansion, and lands were in his eyes of no account in comparison with

his daughter. This was evident in the gratification he felt while noticing the enthusiasm with which every member of the hunt once more balanced himself on his chair and the table, and drank the toast with the full complement of hunting-honours..

About half an hour after this, Arthur Calverley contrived to find his way to the drawing-room, where he discovered Miss Scudamore, in evening dress, seated near the tea-equipage, caressing the old fox-hound Jowler. She sprung forward to meet him, holding out both hands, and smiling and blushing with a face eloquent with welcome. He did not expect that he should be permitted to enjoy her society long, unless the Delamere Hunt were either too thorough-going fox-hunters to care for tea, or should prudently refrain from exhibiting their condition in the drawing-room.

If the truth must be told, Tom Holyoake, who prided himself upon his gallantry in consequence of his heroic adventure at Brabazon Lodge, ventured to move a resolution for an adjournment up-

stairs; but the noisy community were so divided in opinion as to the desirability of presenting themselves to their host's charming daughter, that the Duke laughingly proposed, and was seconded by that now very heavy dragoon Sir Harry Chester, with increased hilarity, that the test of their fitness for a lady's society should be their correct pronunciation of the phrase, "The country is truly rural."

Up jumped Tom Holyoake and Lord Vernon to enforce the test; but, from the jovial Squire to the stately Lord-lieutenant, there was so general a desire manifested to make the country "too-ral-loo-ral," that after innumerable peals of laughter they decided on remaining where they were.

Arthur Calverley and Fanny Scudamore therefore were not interrupted.

CHAPTER X.

ALL IN THE WRONG.

THERE must be something very dangerous in Italian and German vocal music, when sung by two young people of different sexes in a large drawing-room, entirely by themselves; especially when the gentleman is as handsome, gallant, and accomplished as a Captain of a crack cavalry regiment ought to be; and the lady, only a very few years his junior, is not only singularly beautiful and warm-hearted, but particularly anxious to please.

But what could be more natural than that Arthur Calverley and his host's daughter should go to the piano, after they had exhausted every topic of interest, as well as "the cup that cheers

but not inebriates." As it was now evident from the noise below that the fox-hunters were not likely to accept her invitation, Fanny sent the tea equipage away, and then was quite willing to entertain her one gallant to the utmost of her power.

They therefore had proceeded to the piano together, and she readily complied with his very natural request to sing. She possessed a rich voice, and sang with taste and expression. The music she selected was of a perfectly harmless character, admired productions of Rossini and Mozart. No young lady could be blamed for singing them to her father's guest, thus entirely thrown upon her hands for amusement. Moreover, was not he the preserver of her darling Geraldine—and was she not bound for her dear sake to do her utmost to please him?

Of course, in her turn, she asked him to sing. And delighted as well as surprised was she to hear the melodious tenor that presently filled the room. What harm could there be in her father's guest

singing to her delicious *morceaux* from one or two popular operas? None in the world. It would be a pleasure too, when she saw her cousin, to dwell on this delightful gift of her cavalier. So Captain Calverley was permitted to sing the tender airs of the great maestros of that day, with as much sentiment as skill, to the great enjoyment of his fair accompanyist.

Nor could there be any harm in their trying a duet together—not the least in the world. To be sure *La ci darem la mano* was rather affectionate, but it was selected because the music was easy, not because the words were tender or otherwise. Of course no one regards the language in an Italian duet. People sing the notes without troubling themselves about the meaning of the words.

Nevertheless, Mozart's easy duo was as perfect a vocal success as if it had been sung by the lovers in Don Giovanni, instead of by two ordinary acquaintances in an ordinary drawing-room. Their exquisite voices harmonised beautifully:

both sang with refinement as well as tenderness, and each was intensely charmed by the effect.

Similar productions were attempted; but with no more reference to their difficulty than to their language. What can be the harm of calling one another 'my idol' and 'my soul' in singing! It's only Italian. Singers are not in earnest. It's nonsense to fancy it can be wrong.

So to herself reasoned the impulsive and impressionable Fanny Scudamore, as she continued the performance of one musical interpretation of passion after another. Nevertheless, these admirably sung productions exercised a marked effect upon the intimacy of the two young people. At first they had ceremoniously addressed each other as Miss Scudamore and Captain Calverley, but after the first hour at the piano, they had become "Fanny" and "Arthur." Nothing could be more natural.

They seemed to grow tired of duets, and now songs were had recourse to. It so happened that those selected were lyrics of the most decided ten-

derness. The Captain sang "Maid of Athens," in a manner that made the heart of his beautiful companion thrill with rapture. The handsome cavalry officer put all the expression of which his fine voice was capable, into the expressive lines of Byron.

While the singer was turning over the leaves of the music-book, and entreating for "a particular favourite," Fanny was making a strong effort to maintain her self-possession. She seemed in high spirits, talked and laughed with more than her customary vivacity, glanced more frequently at the handsome face bending over her,—her brilliant eyes apparently growing softer in their glow.

The Captain was evidently feeling more interested either in the music, in his own share of the performance, or in that of his charming colleague. He not only sung, but spoke and looked with increased effect. There seemed to be a peculiar persuasiveness in his entreaties, as well as a wonderful power of appeal in his gaze.

No doubt he conducted himself as all hand-

some and accomplished Captains do under precisely similar circumstances,—he was only following the policy of the rising generation of Calverleys,—making the most of his opportunities. He was as well aware that Jack Scudamore's daughter was the best match in the county, as that she possessed the most attractive face and person he had ever beheld. It was impossible to deny, too, that she was uncommonly amiable. How could he help bringing his moustache now and then dangerously near her peach-like cheek?

At last he found his 'particular favourite,' and again came the soft entreaty and the pleading glance. Fanny looked at the title-page; it was a tender German love-song, of which she herself was very fond. It is quite true that she ought to have declined; but what young lady of nineteen, when alone with a handsome young officer, possessing a love of a moustache, and divine whiskers, with eyes peculiarly penetrating, and a voice impressive in every tone, is as prudent as she ought to be? Perhaps Fanny was too good-natured to

refuse now, having complied so often; besides, what harm could there be in singing German words, any more than Italian? It was all make-believe. Of course it did not mean any thing.

She sang the *liebeslied*, but somehow or other her intonation became less firm at particular passages; her voice faltered at the more passionate declarations, and despite of all her efforts to maintain a discreet indifference, she felt an increasing consciousness of the pleasure the sentiment afforded her. The melody had been harmonised, and Arthur took the second. They sang together,

"Du, du liegst mir im Herzen,
Du, du liegst mir im Sinn,
Du, du machst mir viel Schmerzen,
Weisst ja, gut ich dir bin."

They sang all the verses again and again; each time the sounds filled her heart with a sweeter sense of enjoyment; each time they thrilled her soul with a more delicious ecstasy. Both seemed to have become oblivious of any thing save the exquisite pleasure of the moment, abandoning

themselves to the spell which the tender melody and the loving words exercised over their feelings.

They had not noticed that the noisy choruses below had grown less and less clamorous—that "He's a Jolly Good Fellow!" had become extremely intermittent, and "We won't go home till morning" had utterly broken down. The two handsome faces had got so near each other that the love of a moustache more than once seemed about to leap from one pair of eloquent lips to the other.

Indeed the singers were so thoroughly absorbed by their own sensations, that they did not hear a knocking at the door; nor were they aware that any one had entered the room till the hilarious voice of the very stout housekeeper startled them, apparently very much indeed.

"Well, to be sure!" cried Mrs. Lavender, her portly person exhibiting unmistakable signs of pleasure, as she placed a small tray on the table; "how very fond you must be of music to remain

at it so late! why, the gentlemen down-stairs have left ever so long, and the Squire has gone to bed."

Fanny sprung from the music-stool looking a little embarrassed, and her partner in the transgression, as he faced the good-natured intruder, did not seem near so much at his ease as when he had been charging the enemy. Both perhaps would have been less disturbed, had they been aware that the very matronly-looking personage before them had taken particular pains that no one should interrupt their *tête-à-tête.*

"Now, my dear Miss Frances!" she continued in a tone half coaxing, half of remonstrance, "you really must have some spiced negus and a biscuit or two after so much singing; Captain Calverley, too, must be famished. Here are some sandwiches and stout, which is a capital restorative for gentlemen, you know, Captain. Set a good example, and draw a chair here for my dear young lady; she looks quite fatigued, I declare."

The gallant captain evinced the greatest alacrity

in obeying the kindly suggestion, ungallantly wishing the kind suggester at the bottom of the Red Sea; but "the dear young lady," was not so inclined. With rather a dreamy look she went up to him, placed her hand in his, and wished him good night; then smiling her thanks as she uttered the same wish to the considerate attendant, she left the room. That good lady's ample silk skirts immediately rustled after her, and the handsome guest found himself left to his refreshment and his reflections.

But, though Captain Calverley was just a little put out by the interruption that had taken place in his evening's entertainment, he was by no means dissatisfied with it, still less so with himself. He was fully sensible that, at present at least, "his lines had been cast in pleasant places," and, like a true Calverley, was able thoroughly to appreciate his *bonne fortune*. So he ate and he drank and he thought in as agreeable a state of mind as of appetite, then retired for the night, or rather the rest of the morning, and slept the sleep

of the soldier sensible of having got into supremely excellent quarters.

The slumbers of Fanny Scudamore were very different in character; nevertheless, when she rose, it was with certain highly creditable resolutions. With these she met Arthur in the breakfast-room, in her father's presence, and received his attentions, not only then, but throughout the day. The jovial Squire, fresh as a lark, notwithstanding his copious indulgences overnight with his hunting friends, and evidently as much enjoying the presence of his daughter as the society of his guest, exerted himself to the utmost to make the visit pleasant to both. The members of the hunt had returned to their several homes, and he could, therefore, devote himself exclusively to the entertainment of the young people, which he did in that hearty fashion for which he was famed far and wide.

The handsome cavalry officer, therefore, rode about, inspecting improvements on the extensive estate, or looking at the stud, the hounds, and every thing else in the establishment the master

was in the habit of daily superintending, and he now enjoyed the pleasure of witnessing the devotion with which that large household regarded their master's daughter. This, there could be no doubt, was observed with intense gratification by the proud and happy father, for it was continually evident in his glowing features, cheery voice, and joyous laugh.

As for her, the most exacting matron, the most rigid chaperone, could not have found fault with her conduct. The *beau sabreur* was treated with the courtesy due to a guest her father delighted to honour, but with no further consideration. She laughed, she talked, she smiled, it is true; but so she would have done had Sir Harry, or the Duke, Tom Holyoake, or my Lord Rossborough, cavaliers young or old, married or single, rode by her side. She was fulfilling her good resolutions.

In the evening, the pleasant party retired to the drawing-room for tea, where, as she had always done when at home, Fanny played and sang her

father's favourite airs. Although the gallant officer would go to the piano to turn over the leaves, he seemed quite satisfied with listening to the old-fashioned ballads and obsolete ditties which were now selected. Nay, he seemed charmed with the liveliness of "Over the hills and far away," touched with the pathetic history of "The miller's lovely daughter," and quite enjoyed the pleasant associations of "Auld Langsyne."

Moreover, when called upon by his host to contribute to his entertainment, he not only sang a special favourite of his, Walter Scott's "Huntsman's rest," but joined as readily in those very familiar duets, "Life let us cherish," and "Away with melancholy." He prudently ignored "The Maid of Athens." Neither attempted tender Italian arias, or joined in the amorous duos of Mozart or Rossini. As for the dangerous *liebeslied*, it was evidently totally forgotten.

The Squire was very much pleased. He could appreciate good singing, and the rich voice and capital style of his young friend were, he was

well aware, far in advance of the post-prandiary exhibitions of his hunting friends. In short, he was so delighted, that when bed-time came he was quite reluctant to terminate that very pleasant evening. He even acknowledged that he did not know which he had liked best of the two singers; a great compliment to one, for there was nothing in the world that afforded the Squire half the gratification as listening to his favourite songs sung by his daughter.

Fanny Scudamore was, without doubt, quite as well pleased. She fully appreciated the care Arthur had taken to gratify her father's taste, and accompanied him, listened to him, or joined with him in those unexceptionable performances with more real enjoyment than she had experienced in the fervid compositions sung during the preceding evening. She was also in a much better humour with herself, less excitable, less flurried; and when she made her adieux, did not feel an overwhelming sense of having participated in an indulgence that was both deleterious and surreptitious.

The next day there were many guests at Delamere Court, and Fanny was much occupied with the ladies of the party, one of whom was her friend Lucretia Brabazon, to whom particular attention was due. There was also the Reverend Basil Plynlymmon, whose good opinion she was equally desirous to secure; for she had ascertained that with the young ladies as well as the matrons of the neighbourhood he was growing very popular.

Therefore she was constantly either with Miss Brabazon, listening to the startling disclosures of her inner life, which that very strong-minded woman thought proper to confide to her, or receiving the no less important confidences of the Vicar as to certain changes he intended to introduce into the services of the Church, in strict accordance with the rubric; or as to his views of parochial ministration, which were equally novel to her. The young lady appeared becomingly edified, and promised zealous coöperation in his schools and charities.

Nevertheless the meeting between the reverend gentleman and his former pupil interested her a great deal more than his ideas of Church Reform had done; and after witnessing Arthur's cordial recognition of his old tutor, and surprise in his improved appearance, she surrendered herself to the extravagances of her friend from Brabazon Lodge.

Lucretia had become quite a county celebrity, no *réunion* of its notables being considered complete without her. As soon as it had become known that her house had been cleared of its objectionable inmates, her female neighbours had flocked to the once dreaded gates in such numbers that the pressure of their skirts might have done some damage to the specimens in the museum, had not a certain feminine feeling kept one and all at a respectful distance. The proprietress, notwithstanding her previous emphatic denunciation of her sex, particularly of her countrywomen, evinced so much amiability as a hostess, as well as skill as a showwoman, that not to have visited Brabazon Lodge—

not to be able to retail the marvellous sayings and doings of its remarkable tenant, began to be looked upon as disentitling the individual to provincial consideration.

The good housewives not only supplied her with excellent servants, but added so much domestic advice that her *ménage* became as creditable as it had previously been the reverse; while the fashionables invited her to all their gatherings, and seemed never so pleased as when the now "dear eccentric creature" ventured to display more than ordinary strangeness of speech, of dress, and of demeanour. For though the strong-minded woman had thought it as well to conform to established feminine usages in many things, she broke out occasionally into an independence of public opinion that appeared to set public opinion wild with excitement and delight.

Her dress was certainly feminine. Lucretia had dispensed with the transatlantic development of strong-mindedness which she had adopted on her return to England; but her costume was

generally singular, sometimes startling. When riding, she was always to be recognised by a habit of the same colour as the coat worn by the gentlemen of the Delamere Hunt, her head in a Spanish hat with a drooping feather; and thus accoutred, she constantly appeared at *fêtes champetres*, as well as hunt-breakfasts. At evening parties she generally chose to be classical, and astonished her admirers by looking as if she had just walked off a Pompeian vase, or a Greek pediment.

On the present occasion the Squire had invited a few of his neighbours to meet his daughter; and as it was a dinner and evening party, every one came in full toilette.

Arthur could not at first conceal his astonishment when introduced by Fanny Scudamore to her friend. He had never before come in contact with so remarkable a character. He observed her singular garments—he scrutinised her strange head-dress, politeness only restraining his sense of the ludicrous at the wonderful exhibition;

but far more startling to that gallant officer than her apparel, was her speech.

"Oh, ho, Captain Calverley; is it?" she exclaimed, as she looked him full in the face. "Cousin Potter has often mentioned you to me."

Arthur bowed, and expressed his obligations. His words were accompanied with a smile, for Potter's name recalled to his mind certain mess-room jokes about the lieutenant and his lady-love, of whom the said lieutenant often spoke very fervently, which Captain Calverley could not have ventured to repeat to his new acquaintance.

Miss Brabazon set down the smile to her own account, and proceeded to make a further favourable impression by dilating on the breed of Indian chargers, in which she displayed a knowledge of horse-flesh that absolutely astounded the cavalry officer, who had studied the subject more from the barrack-yard than from the race-course. They had an animated conversation, to which Mr. Scuda-

more and his daughter were attentive listeners, though from totally differing causes.

The Squire, as a breeder of horses, could not help being interested in the subject. Fanny, though a thorough-bred had long been an object of the greatest possible admiration to her, was beginning to think that there was a nobler animal in the creation, and listened with most interest when a favourable example of the species took part in the discussion.

"My dear," said the clever Lucretia confidentially to her friend, as they left the gentlemen, "that's a very handsome man—the limbs of an Antinous, and the head of an Apollo. Had he lived in the reign of the Emperor Augustus, the Roman beauties would have been mad after him."

Fanny was quite content that those ladies should have escaped such a contingency; but the commendation of her cavalier made a deep impression on her mind. It was far from being the only flattering opinion she heard pronounced on the gallant captain. All her fair friends were

more or less enthusiastic in his praise, while her male friends, if they said less about his fine figure and handsome face, were quite as cordial in their estimate of his gallantry. As for her father, he seemed never tired of questioning him respecting the battles in which his regiment had so greatly distinguished itself.

Though it afforded her intense pleasure to see the estimation in which Arthur Calverley was held, she was still more glad when her father's guests took their departure. Every day she more and more appreciated the gratification of being alone with him, particularly in the gardens and pleasure-grounds attached to the house, when the Squire was engaged elsewhere; and there she had ample opportunity of noticing how vastly superior he was in mental as well as in personal resources to her father's hunting friends.

She compared him with Tom Holyoake, Sir Harry Chester, and other bachelor members of the Hunt who had been most attentive to her, but it was Hyperion to a good many satyrs—his

elegance, intelligence, and refinement gave him overwhelming advantages over the jolly, hard-drinking fox-hunters, most of whom had long passed their youth.

At last the time approached for his departure, and Fanny contrived that no company should be invited for the previous day. She passed it in riding and walking with him to all their favourite resorts; and the Squire, experiencing a slight attack of gout, remained in his easy-chair. She enjoyed much delightful conversation; in which, however, she took less than her usual share. They had at first had a great deal to say about dear Geraldine and her pleasant home; but latterly, her name had ceased to be spoken by either. Indeed, Arthur's interest in Rose Lawn and its inmates appeared to have passed away. At any rate, he now gave no evidence of its existence.

Like other Calverleys, he was perfectly sensible of his good fortune. He would have been far more obtuse than promising cavalry officers are generally, if he had not seen it. Jack Scuda-

more's daughter, with only her personal attractions, ought to have sufficed to fill his landscape with sunshine; but as the heiress of Delamere Court, all his well-married connections must acknowledge that his prospect was dazzlingly brilliant.

He could not help recalling the parting advice of his kinsman, Lord Madras. "It is high time, my boy, for you to think of putting your advantages out at interest in a first-rate matrimonial investment. The Calverleys, you know, have been singularly fortunate in such speculations."

And then the Bishop's widow—how could he forget her pious exhortations to show his gratitude to Providence for the favours so bounteously conferred upon him, by marrying only where Divine beneficence was still more strikingly manifested. Lastly came his dear mother's prudent counsels. He felt convinced that he should satisfy all their desires. Indeed, he was assured that the most fortunate of the Calverleys would be obliged to acknowledge that his choice of a wife had done them no discredit.

In this humour, on the evening previous to his return to town, Arthur once more found himself standing at the piano, turning over the leaves, listening to Fanny's ballads, singing to her accompaniment, or joining in duets, the Squire reclining in his easy-chair, his painful foot resting against a gout-stool, calling for the old-fashioned tunes associated with the most pleasant period of his pleasant life, and praising every performance with a heartiness that seemed to stimulate the vocalists to increased exertions.

They had sung together, "Time has not thinned my flowing hair," "All's well," and several other equally unexceptionable arrangements for two voices, and were looking over a music-book for a similar production.

"By the way, Fanny," cried the Squire, "can't you sing me that pretty thing you and Geraldine sang so often when she was here last?"

Had a bomb-shell exploded at the feet of the beautiful *pianiste*, it would scarcely have excited her more than did this apparently harmless speech.

In the first place, the sudden mention of her cousin's name thrilled her nature with the most painful emotions; in the next, the composition referred to recalled feelings that almost overpowered her, in her present highly-excitable state.

Arthur was surprised at the disinclination his amiable colleague exhibited to comply with her father's request; but his astonishment greatly increased when more urgent solicitations induced her to bring forth the identical *liebeslied* they had sung with so much expression the first night they were together in the drawing-room.

Fanny tried hard to shake off the feeling that came insidiously over her, creeping through her system like a subtle vapour that was mastering her senses; but she could not help a tremor that shook her frame as she commenced the opening symphony, nor could she keep her voice quite steady as she commenced the stirring phrases of the love-song.

She sang in English, because her father did not care to hear words he could not understand—

a terrible ordeal to her—for these were the words of the opening verse,

> Thou, thou reign'st in this bosom;
> There, there hast thou thy throne;
> Thou, thou know'st that I love thee;
> Am I not fondly thine own?

What made the trial worse to her a thousand times, was, her father insisted on Arthur joining in the duet; and together they sang every eloquent verse, his tones growing more dangerously emphatic as he proceeded.

She was glad when it was over, and yet was sorry; for every passionate word that fell upon her ear thrilled her soul with an ecstasy she had never known before. Her trials, however, had only commenced. The Squire was delighted, and cried out lustily for a repetition. Arthur looked at her appealingly, but did not venture otherwise to express his sentiments. Fanny, with a heart much too full to speak, turned back the leaves and recommenced the symphony.

She sung with undiminished consciousness of

the situation, but with less fear. She could make no further struggle. She surrendered herself to the delicious enjoyment of loving and being loved, and poured out her soul in those passionate declarations till the last dangerous *refrain* was about to commence.

Whether it was that the Squire had become cloyed with the lusciousness of this last performance, or was tired of the music, or could no longer withstand the influence of bedtime, certain it is that he must have felt a sense of weariness soon after the commencement of the *encore*, for he closed his eyes. A few minutes later, heavy breathing, followed by louder evidence of his unconsciousness, proclaimed his condition to the more watchful of the singers. The other was sensible only of her own ecstatic happiness.

She saw that handsome face bending over her, the bright eyes expressing ineffable tenderness, proclaiming to her throbbing heart the intensity of his love. Nearer and nearer it came, till the soft wavy hair of that noble head almost touched

her hot cheek. Her bosom heaved tumultuously; and the long silken lashes closed over orbs that dared no longer look up. Presently she felt the silken moustache pressed upon her lips, and had not either the will or the power to resist.

How long it rested there she could not tell; it may have been but a few seconds; it was to her an age—an age of unutterable bliss. As soon as the spell was removed, she rose from the music-stool, and glided from the room in a state of semi-consciousness, as in a mesmeric sleep.

When she found herself seated in the secure privacy of her own chamber, she tried to recall the incidents of the past few days—of the past few hours—of the past few minutes—that had so deeply affected her. She remembered the words, looks, the tones that had filled her with a new life. The declaration of the love-song, *Du, du liegst mir im Herzen*, "Am I not fondly thine own?" came upon her soul with the assurance of a revelation; and the burning caress with which it con-

cluded had stamped upon it a seal that should ever testify to its truth.

Suddenly in the intense enjoyment of her happiness, a vision rose before her—a fair, girlish face, as full of beauty as of innocence, in whose dove-like eyes floated the spirit of a child-like trust. In a moment the flushed countenance became deadly pale, an expression of unutterable agony took possession of those lovely features; and, spasmodically covering her face with her hands, she exclaimed, in tones tremulous with remorse, "O God, what have I done!"

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